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NOVEMBER 13 1981

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## COMMERCE

## The big store

By Eugen Weber

MICHAEL B. MILLER:

*The Bon Marché*  
Bourgeois Culture and the  
Department Store, 1869-1930  
266pp. Allen and Unwin. £12.50.  
0 04 330316 1

Michael Miller has written a book that is both fascinating and original, about a large department store and its place not only in business history, but in the history of French society, culture and bureaucracy. The Bon Marché was the chief inspiration for Emile Zola's *Au bonheur des dames*, a story documented chiefly by observation and research in its departments and in those of its chief rival, the Grands Magasins du Louvre. By 1882, when Zola wrote the novel in which he intended to re-create "the poetry of modern activity", department stores were no longer new. Although Miller insists that the Bon Marché was the first real department store in France, a precise birthday is difficult to determine. Restoration Paris knew several large *magasins de nouveautés*, like the Coint de Rue and the Deux Magots, retailing drapery and fancy goods. And the figure of the seminal shop assistant, Monsieur Calicot, was established as early as 1817 in a play by Scribe ("le calicot est bon à tout et propre à rien"). The young fop and his sentimental companion, Mademoiselle Percelline, must have had a business address.

Twenty years after Scribe, such enterprises and their personnel no longer appeared especially remarkable, at least in Paris, although large retail stores that offered free entry (*entrée libre*) and fixed, marked prices (*prix fixe*) remained exceptional and, by some, unloved. In 1843 a deputy found reason to denounce "the growth of certain stores where - how horrible! - the buyer can provide himself at once with stockings, handkerchiefs, shirts, shawls, woollens and silks", to the small shopkeeper's despair. The following year annual special sales made their appearance, generators of particularly vast turnover, and the press began to talk of "monster stores", so great that customers would have to cross them in an omnibus.

The Bon Marché itself dated back at least to the 1830s. Aristide Boucicaut, its leader-to-be, bought into it in 1852 when it boasted four departments, twelve employees and a sales volume of 450,000 francs a year. He watched the Louvre and the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville opening in the mid-1850s, the Printemps in 1865, by which time his sales had passed the 7 million mark. By 1869, when Boucicaut and his wife laid the cornerstone of the present building, the Louvre's turnover nudged 100 million francs a year, with that of the Bon Marché not far behind, and due to overtake it before long. Yet the glass and iron palace that the Boucicauts built was the first to be deliberately conceived and designed as a grand magasin (the Samaritaine followed in 1870 and the Galeries Lafayette in 1895), so Miller is right to claim for it a priority of sorts. It was also, and would remain, the only great department store on the Left Bank, most of the other big department stores made available to vast numbers of people at significantly lower prices - perhaps 20 per cent less than in smaller shops. Lower prices meant that possessions once limited to a few became mass-consumer items available to all of French middle-class society which, along with the proliferating sheets and towels and table-cloths (sensible precautions when laundry seldom performed), the parasols and fans and gloves, cycling apparel, gymnastic equipment and swimming costumes would adopt the values and life-style of the upper classes. What Miller calls the democratization of luxury seems to bear out the Utilitarians more than the Marxists.

The new Bon Marché was, and was meant to be, immense. When it stopped building in 1887, the monumental structure occupied a whole city block, 52,800 square metres, and offered over 200 different items for sale to two thousand clients a day, twice as many a decade later, about 70,000 on days of special sales when the daily

volume of sales could rise to over one and a half million francs. At the turn of the century, seventeen people worked in the umbrella department, eighty in baby clothes, 100 in *trousseaux*, and sixty sold one and a half million pairs of gloves a year, worth about five and a half million francs. Miller, who does not mention the gloves, despite their crucial role as a loss leader, does not tell us if the Bon Marché had a special department for mourning garb - another big seller of the day. It probably competed with specialized shops, like "la Senbouse", on the rue de la Paix, or Charrière, place de la Madeleine (a branch of the Trois-Quartiers), although it did not, as they did, stay open on Sunday mornings to permit clients leaving high mass at the Madeleine to place urgent orders for *articles pour deuil et demi-deuil*.

The volume of sales, seventy-three million francs a year in 1887, 123 million ten years later, had in 1906 passed the 200 million mark; by then, the regular shop staff, 1,788 in 1877, 3,173 in 1887, numbered 4,500,

a buffet-bar, and a whole series of cultural events from *assauts d'écriture* to musical concerts - including regular open-air concerts in the square outside on summer Saturdays. The lineaments of refinement that distinguished the upper classes from the lower were being enlisted in the service of an enterprise dedicated to narrowing the distance between the two. But this, on lines only slightly more slender, Zola could have found in other shops. What made the Bon Marché outstanding, and gives it a claim to priority in the field, was that, thanks to Boucicaut, it combined the low prices, which were the chief attraction of all department stores, with an unexampled standard of trustworthiness and service. Avenel remarks that, until Boucicaut came along, the public had had the choice between good fabrics that were expensive, and cheap fabrics that were bad; the originality of the new method was to sell merchandise whose quality was guaranteed at the price that others charged for shoddy stuff. This made shopping easier and more attractive, shifted its focus

made possible (his mother's small business went down before its lower prices); the effects of wide boulevards ideal for cross-city travel and of the public transportation that used them (the Compagnie générale des Omnibus was set up in 1855, trams came in the 1870s); the lower-middle-class origins of shop assistants, their aspirations to bourgeois status, the costly sartorial splendour expected of them (at the *Pauvre Diable* "une mise soignée était de rigueur": black coat, white waistcoat, clean fingernails); the dubious living conditions and worse hygiene - the rats, the cots and pallets set up among the counters late at night, beginners unrolling a mattress on the counters; the variable food and the long working hours, beginning at 7 and ending at 10 except on sales days which might end in the small hours of the morning; the nagging, the harsh discipline, the fines. At the Coint de Rue, 50 centimes for dropping a pile of material, 1 franc for climbing on a chair to reach an upper shelf, a day's wages for a few minutes lost.

and extraordinary absence of personal elegance. In such circumstances, insistence on high and uniform standards and their "obsessive enforcement" made good sense, and the department store takes its place as one more school of urban (or civil) civility, along with the school, the army, and the popular press.

The Bon Marché and its like offered conditions of work superior by far to those of other shops. Salaries were not particularly high, but the commissions salesmen could earn, the *guelte*, more than doubled their income. Miller is right when he describes the commission system as a device to foster individualism and competitiveness among the sales force, but wrong if he believes it peculiar to the Bon Marché. There and elsewhere, food and keep remained primary considerations. Beginners worked for them alone, as Lejeune did when he started work in 1859, at fourteen, "nourri et couché", which he counted as equivalent to 600 francs a year. Soon he was able to earn three or four francs a week by selling seconds on the side, and to better himself by moving on to the *Pauvre Diable* where he got bed, board and twenty-five francs a month. This was the normal progression, from apprentice - *bistrot*, *rouffion* - to salesmen, moving from shop to shop as the young Chaudard had finally moved from the *Pauvre Diable* to start his new venture at the Louvre.

Nor was the *guelte* new. Salesmen at the *Pauvre Diable* and the Coint de Rue received a *fixe* that rose from 1,200 to 1,800 francs, but commissions kept their income - like Lejeune's - between 3 and 4,000 francs a year, comparable to that which Boucicaut paid his salesmen. At a time when bread cost thirteen centimes the kilo, milk fifteen centimes the litre and wine six *sous*; when a decent apartment could be rented for 450 francs a year and a workman's daily wage hovered around four francs, this sort of income could ensure a better-than-modest middle-class life. Provided you could rely on it. There was the rub.

If, like all *calicots*, Xavier-Edouard looked to the Bon Marché as to the promised land, it was because of other advantages. The very standards the Bon Marché demanded - obedience, loyalty, devotion, industry, a new degree of commitment to "the House" - suggested a novel kind of long-term aspirations and career for a very individualistic trade. Where once the shop assistant's dream had been to better himself by moving from one job to another until he could set up in business on his own, the department store offered him (hers were few: 152 women among 2,500 employees when Zola did his research in 1882, and never more than one sixth of the work force thereafter) the choice of another kind of life: that of organization folk. Those employees who adapted to the unfamilial regime and who did not fall by the wayside through ill-health or fatigue, as one in five seems to have done, were assured a high degree of permanence - almost a kind of tenure. There were free meals, not bad ones either and, for some, free lodgings; there were segregated common-rooms, with a piano for the women and billiards for men, on the firm of a savings bank where, by 1886, 297 employees had placed over 3 million francs at 6 per cent interest, and, beginning in 1872, free evening courses in English and later Spanish, music and fencing. By the early years of the twentieth century, paternalist concern for the "great family" had produced paid sick leave and free health care, paid maternity leave (the Samaritaine set up a day nursery in the 1890s), gifts at the birth of each child and family allowances for employees with three children or more, relief for widows and orphans, and even paid annual holidays ranging from a few days to two weeks. Above all, beginning in the 1870s, the Bon Marché had a pension fund financed entirely from store revenues to which Mme



while the total work force that year was 7,000 strong. That would include the waiters and kitchen staff who fed all these people twice a day: the personnel involved in the mail-order sales which brought in thirty-three million by the turn of the century, those sending out millions of annual catalogues, providing direct delivery in Paris and outlying localities (ninety-three places in 1876, 600 by 1912), or managing the seventy delivery wagons and the 150 horses that drew them in the 1890s; not to mention the publicity department, the complaints department, the interpreters, security staff, firemen, or *à son passe*.

Here was the great throbbing machine that Zola likened to a steam engine, existing in its scale, its wealth and in the energy it expended. A giant for some an ogre - whose pulsations illustrated the struggle for life in which the strong crush the weak; a good thing, Zola thought, as the Vicomte d'Avenel did after him, because that was the way of modernity. In Miller's book, Zola's fabulous monster becomes "a bourgeois instrument of social homogenization". Concentration of services, integration of operations, rapid turnover, meant on expanding market and shrinking costs, vast quantities of goods made available to vast numbers of people at significantly lower prices - perhaps 20 per cent less than in smaller shops. Lower prices meant that possessions once limited to a few became mass-consumer items available to all of French middle-class society which, along with the proliferating sheets and towels and table-cloths (sensible precautions when laundry seldom performed), the parasols and fans and gloves, cycling apparel, gymnastic equipment and swimming costumes would adopt the values and life-style of the upper classes. What Miller calls the democratization of luxury seems to bear out the Utilitarians more than the Marxists.

The store had become one of the monuments of Paris, almost on a par with the Eiffel Tower. It offered daily tours, a palatial reading-room,

from mere "purchase to entertainment, and integrated the Parisian's beloved *flânerie* into a new or newly expanded consumer economy. The very notion of shopping as a leisure activity especially made for women had been unthinkable as long as entry into a shop implied an obligation to buy, and in order to buy to haggle, in situations where however cautious the customer, the risk of being gulled, tricked, cheated or humiliated ran high. My own university library, at UCLA, has a copy of the manuscript memoirs of an old *calicot* of those days, Xavier-Edouard Lejeune, who in the 1860s worked for a while at the Coint de Rue, near the Palais-Royal, which he describes as - then the largest fancy-goods store in town. He tells of alcoholic department heads, drunken salesmen and, in other shops, of clients intimidated into a buying (if they don't buy, they surely mean to steal), and rooked when they do buy. Lejeune eventually finds employment in a lesser store, the Grand-Saint-Louis, whose *patron* - like Jules Jaluzot who founded Le Printemps, and Louise Jay, co-founder of the Samaritaine - had learnt his trade at the Bon Marché and sought to apply its lessons in an establishment "untrammelled by all the turpitudes of other places, and to gain public confidence by irreproachable honesty". Lejeune's description of his *patron*'s views gives us the Bon Marché policies in a nutshell and reveals the radical departure they represented from established practices: "to sell good and reliable merchandise at small profit and at fixed prices marked in comprehensible figures on the label, to take back or exchange any purchase without any trouble; to be pleasant, calm, helpful, conscientious with clients whatever their exigencies; that was the absolute method that made the Bon Marché's fortune even more than its organization and its credit."

Lejeune's ingenious memoirs bear out most of what Miller tells us: the impact of sewing-machines and of the ready-to-wear clothes that they

made possible (his mother's small business went down before its lower prices); the effects of wide boulevards ideal for cross-city travel and of the public transportation that used them (the Compagnie générale des Omnibus was set up in 1855, trams came in the 1870s); the lower-middle-class origins of shop assistants, their aspirations to bourgeois status, the costly sartorial splendour expected of them (at the *Pauvre Diable* "une mise soignée était de rigueur": black coat, white waistcoat, clean fingernails); the dubious living conditions and worse hygiene - the rats, the cots and pallets set up among the counters late at night, beginners unrolling a mattress on the counters; the variable food and the long working hours, beginning at 7 and ending at 10 except on sales days which might end in the small hours of the morning; the nagging, the harsh discipline, the fines. At the Coint de Rue, 50 centimes for dropping a pile of material, 1 franc for climbing on a chair to reach an upper shelf, a day's wages for a few minutes lost.

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Boucault left most of her vast estate when she died in 1887, ten years after her husband.

Soon after her death tiny troubles began to stir: small shopkeepers formed a league against the large stores that were driving them out of business; commercial employees, discontent since the end of the Second Empire, organized to secure better working conditions - many of these already available to the staff at Sevres-Babylone. Hostile press campaigns began to trouble the prosperous quinquide. In 1891 and 1892 alone, 200,000 francs would be spent by the directors of the firm Martine "for the defence of the interests of the *grands magasins*". The interests in question continued well defended. No strike arrested their growth between 1899 and 1919. Despite the war, sales and profits continued to soar. That is when Professor Miller ends his tale, as the great family firm, challenged by new plants and by changing conditions, turns itself into a limited liability company. But, though since 1920 a *société anonyme*, nothing remains less anonymous than Boucault's store.

It is a fine story well told. Only Miller's emphasis on the role of self-interest in the Boucaults' policies, especially their philanthropy, while completely convincing, labours the obvious a bit. Nor does it go far to explain why the widow Boucault, a simple uneducated woman of peasant origins, when bereft of her heirs, should have almost all her millions to her employees. How far can private and public benefit continue before they stir the ire of the public?

These great entrepreneurs were, almost all, of modest origins. Boucault had been an itinerant pedlar before he came to Paris and got a job: Ernest Cognac, an orphan boy from the Saintonge, had been a pedlar too and a street-stall keeper; Félix Potin, creator of the food markets, was a small trader's son; so was Emile Morin, who started as an errand-boy at the Bon Marche in 1856 and became its General Manager in 1887. Lejeune himself, though nowhere so successful, was able to launch a distinguished dynasty of *universitaires* and artists. Far more of this ilk did not do so well; but those who survived the struggle were more

than money grubbers. Their moral obligations went beyond the personal and the familial realm, then private sentiments (as Lejeune's pages show) included public responsibility, and all took a strong interest, highly progressive in its time, in the welfare of their employees. It is almost as if they had read the famous passage of the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx and Engels exhort the bourgeoisie's destruction of old ties, and had determined that these must be re-established. Personal worth would not be resolved in exchange value only, self-interest could not be the only nexus between man and man, the icy water of egotistical calculation had to be warmed by other sentiments, exploitation had to be veiled by illusions and tempered by reforms. And it is precisely because they, and their like succeeded so well, that Georges Sorel was driven to denounce the - to him misleading - social harmony of the *fin-de-siècle*.

All this can properly be viewed as a reflection of self-interest; but surely, of enlightened self-interest. Much, it seems to me, insists too much on the interest, too little on the enlightenment. The fact is that the same social imagination and the same sense of duty that made Boucault's success also made his paternalism. Philanthropy - sometimes - pays, of course; and his was a case in point. D'Avenel testifies that the Boucaults' generosity to their employees had turned into the best kind of publicity for their store. But we do not know how present that thought of profit was in the mind of this particular entrepreneur or, for that matter, in that of his contemporaries. Félix Potin, when he sold out his food stocks during the hard autumn and winter of 1870-71 at the prices obtaining before the German siege.

In any case, not even Professor Miller, after his years with the Bon Marche archives, can resist the romance of modern merchandizing. He certainly makes it hard for his readers to shrug it off. His pages witness that not all business barons were robber barons and that, as Marx well knew, the most epic activities of the modern world involved no lance and sword but dry goods.

## Imperial refuge

By Robin Buss

ALICE G. HARGREAVES: *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction*. A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernest Psichari and Pierre Millev. 193pp. Macmillan. £20. 0 333 28854 8

Alice G. Hargreaves's title might lead one to expect rather more than an analysis of the work of three minor writers, of whom only Pierre Loti is likely to be known to most readers. The colonial experience was an important element in Loti's fiction, as in that of Ernest Psichari and Pierre Millev, and Dr Hargreaves's thesis is an interesting one, though it might have been made available at less expense in a series of scholarly articles. It is, essentially, that the imperialist attitudes in the work of Loti, Psichari and, to a lesser extent, Millev, were due to their qualities as writers and that their novels reflect the ambiguous nature of the colonialist enterprise.

Loti, who in fact found his most promising subject among the Breton fishermen of *Pêcheur d'Islande*, was attracted to the colonies by a yearning for lush scenery and submissive women; Psichari by a lust for dominance which eventually found a more acceptable outlet in religious mysticism. By the end of the nineteenth century, the French Empire could provide Loti with tropical islands and Psichari with exotic leanings. Given the differences in their outlook and ambitions, it is at first sight surprising that Hargreaves can feel equal antipathy towards both men, but this is explained by the fact that their divergent attitudes led to an equal

degree of contempt for the native inhabitants of this Empire, which one of Psichari's characters views as "cette lumière contre comme un pur où il pût s'ébattre et hantier, aller et venir, selon son caprice et comme un hasard de son bon plaisir".

In contrast, Millev seems to have been an engaging writer with a sharp eye for the motives of the European colonists and a lot of sympathy for those they oppressed. Hargreaves may be taking unfair advantage of his own post-colonialist viewpoint in concluding that, in the last resort, Millev was also guilty of complicity in the economic exploitation of the Empire. And while in human terms his work may be more attractive than that of Loti or Psichari, this is no guarantee of its literary worth. Millev did however have a sense of irony and a capacity to enjoy the diversity of the colonial scene, while Loti and Psichari both suffered from an inability to relate fully to others which narrowed their view of it and led Loti to seek women as objects and Psichari to seek the highly structured social environment of the Army and the Church. For them, the colonies seemed to offer a refuge, but the escape proved illusory: their colonial experience was sadly restricted by the personal inadequacies they had exported from Metropolitan France.

Julian Shuckburgh's *The Second Bedside Book* (255pp. Windward, £7.95, 0 7112 0207 9), a new anthology of prose and verse extracts, has recently been published. Living British writers predominate, with examples of the work of Kenneth Clark, Clive James, John Fowles, Iris Murdoch, E. V. Rieu, Martin Amis and John Le Carré. There are also poems by Charlotte Mew and letters by Evelyn Waugh.

## The battle of Whitehall

By C. M. Woodhouse

KENNETH YOUNG (Editor): *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*. Volume II 1939-1965. 800pp. Macmillan. £30. 0 333 18181 7

The second volume of Bruce Lockhart's Diaries covers the years from 1939 to 1965, though for the last three years only a few letters survive. The diaries consist mainly of high-level gossip: always entertaining, sometimes revealing, usually secondhand. It is not his faith that many of his anecdotes are not new. They were certainly new when he wrote them down, but many of them have been endlessly retold in the past thirty or forty years. Occasionally he gives an early version of a familiar story, which is presumably more authentic though less *bona fide* than the established version.

This is particularly true of the many items from the Churchill canon. Wavell's famous comment, in response to Churchill's criticism of his low casualties, that a big "butcher's bill" was not a good criterion of a general's success, turns out to have referred less graphically to a "cemetery bill". But one cannot be sure, for all Lockhart's stories involving Churchill are reported from others. So far as the evidence of the diaries goes, Lockhart seems never to have met Churchill face to face during the Second World War. In this volume he records only one occasion when he was even in the same room as Churchill, and that was on election day in 1935. Nevertheless Churchill is without rival the central figure of the book. So vivid is Lockhart's characterization of Churchill at war that it is curious to notice how it is built up, from conversations with Eden, Beaverbrook, Bracken and a few others, but never from personal observation.

Lockhart's sources are first-class, of course, but his reliance on them shows that he was not at the very centre of things, though occupying an important place on the periphery. His wartime appointment, following years of unconventional diplomacy, banking, journalism, and one or two other mis-hits, was as Director-General of the Political Warfare Executive. Its importance was confirmed by a knighthood on his appointment. It brought him into contact with senior Cabinet Ministers and Service chiefs, but not with the central direction of the war. To perform his functions in propaganda he needed to know much but not everything: the date of D-day in 1944, for example, but not the secrets of Enigma or the atomic bomb. He was perhaps disappointed to find himself the head of a peripheral department rather than among Churchill's intimates. After all, twenty years earlier as a young man he had been appointed personally by Lloyd George as the first British official representative to the Bolsheviks. More than once he chides himself in his diaries for accepting the thankless post of directing PWE.

Political warfare is a great mystery, which is how Lockhart's diaries leave it. Without Kenneth Young's valuable introduction and helpful footnotes, it would be hard to deduce what exactly Lockhart was doing. Although he was conscientious, energetic, and tactful in handling his team of brilliant but erratic experts, propaganda seems to have had less than an irresistible appeal for him. He was well aware that it was no substitute for military victory, and that it could achieve little until we were already winning the war.

There is less in his diaries about political warfare between Britain and Germany than between government departments in Whitehall, and even between allies; and there is less also about these than about the personalities involved. Like the great nineteenth-century diarists, Lockhart was mainly interested in social and political gossip. Considering the diaries as literature, this is not a reproach, for he had a splendid

eloquence in denouncing stupidity and championing his friends; and his friends were excellent sources of gossip.

There was a wartime joke about a man walking down Whitehall who asked which side the War Office was on. "Ours, I hope", was the reply. Many government departments would have replied less optimistically about each other, and Lockhart's was no exception. He found himself regularly at loggerheads with the Ministry of Information, the BBC, the Special Operations Executive (a "bizarre, irresponsible, corrupt show" which ought to be disbanded), and even occasionally with the Foreign



Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart

Office, his own former department. He had less trouble with the Chiefs of Staff, because he had senior liaison officers of high ability. But in 1940 he wrote glowingly that "the battle of Whitehall is far more important to civil servants than the battle of Britain". Three years later he found that much the same was true of the Americans, though in every case there were a few admirable exceptions.

All these feuds were conducted in terms of personalities as much as policies, and the personality sketches are by far the most interesting feature of the diaries. Telling portraits of the bureaucrats are built up from innumerable daily contacts, with the inevitable tendency of such impressions to produce occasional contradictions. As a renegade bureaucrat himself Lockhart was better qualified to assess them than he was to assess the generals. He had little respect for Montgomery, because he failed to conduct himself as a gentleman. He also recorded a deplorable judgment on Slim, who "has little personality and looks a little common". He dismissed Wavell as merely "lucky" - in retrospect, a strange verdict. But he quickly saw the high quality of the Americans, particularly Eisenhower and Bedell Smith. About half his judgments stand up fairly well after nearly forty years, and those that do not are at least interesting as contemporary impressions.

But it is with the politicians, and especially the most unconventional of them, that Lockhart's jottings are most successful. Apart from Churchill, the dominant figures are Eden, Beaverbrook and Bracken, with all of whom he had very frequent contact. To students of the war years, the talents and eccentricities of Beaverbrook and Bracken are sufficiently well known. Lockhart fills in the familiar outlines with authentic and often hilarious detail. But Eden, in spite of rising higher than either of them, remains a mystery. Lockhart's observations of his charm and courage, do not dispense the mystery, but they help to reconcile the contradictions. It becomes easier to understand Eden's tragedy of 1956, which Lockhart in a sense foreshadows. When that tragedy came, Lockhart made no reference to it; in a letter

to his son, he confined his comments to the simultaneous tragedy of Budapest.

There is one other leading politician about whom Lockhart's insight was even more exact. Because of his earlier service in Russia and Czechoslovakia, he had become intimate with the Czech leaders, especially Benes and the younger Masaryk. He broadcast regularly to both Czech and Russian. For a time he was the British representative with the Czech provisional government in exile, and he could have become, if he had wished, the first postwar Ambassador in Prague. He had a special affection for the talented and mercantile Jan Masaryk. Not long after the war, he foresaw that Masaryk would commit suicide when conditions in Prague became intolerable, as he was sure they would. Masaryk did so (unless, more doubtfully, he was murdered) in March 1948.

Lockhart's broader prognostications about Central Europe were not always so accurate. No expert's eye can be. But his errors of judgment often reflect merely what he was being told by officials at the Foreign Office. The pity is that he so seldom makes his own comments on them.

So that they easily pass for views which he accepted himself. Unfair though it is to criticize his judgment on the basis of high-level gossip and casual jottings, there is no other criterion, for he never wrote any work of substance on international politics. This was not in his nature. He had brilliant talents, but he dispersed them too widely. His range also was limited, extending little beyond Central Europe (apart from a youthful foray into Malay); and his conception of the forces which determined events was even more limited, being confined to the personalities of the great men among whom he moved.

A characteristic generalization of his view of history is that "in big events destiny is just another word for luck". He makes this statement with reference to an American diplomat, Joe Davies, who had been in Russia with him at the time of the Revolution, and had a more successful subsequent career. There are few such revelations of Lockhart's personal feelings. About once a year he indulged in a bout of pessimistic reflection, lamenting his life of dissipation, financial extravagance, excessive drinking, dependence on sleeping drugs, and what he called (quite inaccurately, according to his editor) "whoring". Once towards the end of his life he speculated ironically on religion (having been successively a Presbyterian, an Anglican, and a somewhat irregular Catholic). That is about the limit of his self-serenity, at least in those parts of his diary which Kenneth Young has chosen for publication.

Did Lockhart intend his diary to be published? Probably he did, for in 1945 he spent several months on "annotation and cross-indexing" of his war diaries. No man so extrovert as Lockhart would have done so purely for his own benefit. Nor could it have been a mere self-indulgence to keep a diary going for nearly half a century. He must have been aware that much of his record was superficial and short-lived, but there are occasional passages which have both literary and historical merit: for example, the account of the night before D-Day in Whitehall; or the three distinct and irreconcilable accounts which he heard within a few days (from Beaverbrook, Chips Eden and Eden) of the composition of Churchill's broadcast on the day Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.

Both volumes of Lockhart's diaries contain a picture of a vanished age. Lockhart himself was well aware that he had outlived his age. But it was an age worth living through, and also worth recording, even in the most ephemeral form.

POSTAGE: INLAND 15p ABROAD 7p

SECOND-CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY. PRICE \$12.95. SUBSCRIBERS US (BY AIR FREIGHT) \$20.00 YEARLY. CENTS NEWS PAPER OF GREAT BRITAIN INC. 20 EAST 42ND STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10017

CHRISTINA LARNER: *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland*. 250pp. Clarendon and Windus. £12.95. 0 7111 2424 5

Scholarly interest in the persecution of witches is keen, and it is easy to see why. It consummates a fashionable union between history and anthropology: it is a discrete aspect of the study of crime in general in early modern Europe - another fashionable subject, but one which it is difficult to handle as a whole - and in its general attitude of irrational malignity as well as some of its methods and symptoms (torture by induced insomnia, for instance, and "voluntary" trial confessions), the witchcraft pogrom foreshadows some of the more distressing practices of our own age. In fact, some of the best work on witch beliefs was done by Norman Cohn, as head of the now-defunct Columbus Centre for the Comparative Study of the Dynamics of Persecution and Extermination, at Sussex University.

But we can make no great sense of the matter as a European phenomenon, despite the assistance of sociologists and anthropologists, which is why Hugh Trevor-Roper's synthesis of current learning, published in 1967, has not been replaced. The dominance of Catholicism or Protestantism, the level of education, the standard of living of the masses, their restlessness or quiescence, seems to have had little influence on the incidence or persistence of witchcraft persecution except in limited areas, and it is difficult to see any overall pattern.

Resignably, scholars have concluded that such a pattern is unattainable in the present state of our knowledge, and they have turned instead to detailed studies of individual regions or countries, of which Christina Larner's is the latest. *Enemies of God* is a model of its kind, in that while it brings the study of the subject in its Scottish environment to a new level of definition, it also pits forward theories and poses questions which are of general application.

The Scottish witch-hunt was one of the most intensive in Europe, given the small population involved, and even then it was heavily concentrated on the eastern Lowlands. The Witchcraft Act of 1563 made it a capital offence not only to be a witch but knowingly to consult one, and an Order in Council of 1597 placed the investigation and prosecution of such offences in the hands of Privy Council commissions, usually acting on information provided by the ever-

watchful Kirk Session in every parish. Cases continued into the eighteenth century, much later than in England, and the act was repealed until 1735.

On the other hand, as Mrs Larner points out, the language of the act of 1563 was almost as sceptical as that of the act which repealed it, speaking as it did of "vain superstition," or "heavy and abominable superstition," and before the end of the seventeenth century the more enlightened judges, notably Judge Advocate Mackenzie, were trying to damp down the persecution, as in England. One of the most interesting chapters of this book deals with the defence against charges of witchcraft, which was often successful - more often, surely, than was usual elsewhere, even in England? There is even one instance of a witch putting a Kirk Session to rout: in regard the abhorred Esopth MacTavish, alleged to be employed to perform the charm, is notoriously known to be most intractable, incapable and infamous and irreconcilable the Session waives troubling themselves with her.

Mrs Larner has already participated in an SSRC project on this subject, which produced *A Source Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (1977), and though she issues many disclaimers, prompted by the patchy nature of her evidence and its resistance to statistical analysis, her factual account of the witch hunt, contained in the central section of the present book (chapters 5-10), must be regarded as definitive, and it would only be criticized - though I doubt if criticism is called for - by that select band of souls who are at once experts on Scottish history and on law enforcement in early modern Europe. Of more general interest is her attempt to relate her information to that available for other European countries, and also to place it in the general framework of Scots society in the seventeenth century.

The Scots standard of living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not far above the subsistence level, but there is no evidence that witchcraft was a reaction against economic privation, or an attempt to divert attention from it, nor was the persecution of witches aimed at controlling unrest amongst the working classes. Scotland, in fact, was one of the most tightly disciplined of early modern societies, despite the spectacular and endemic disorder among the high nobility. In common with most sixteenth-century ecclesiastical regimes, the Calvinist Church of Scotland faced the task of christianizing and assimilating a largely godless lower class, and it approached this task with an efficiency and a degree

## The Demonic Pact

By J. P. Kenyon

of coordination between Church and State, which was unusual in contemporary Europe. There was no such thing as an absentee clergy, and is not an enlightening as it is intended to be, and she reminds us of the body and even suspect place occupied by women in Judeo-Christian theology: their susceptibility to the Evil One ever since Eden, their limitless sexual capacity, their natural capacity for malignancy, especially in menstruation, and so on. I must admit that I am not entirely satisfied with these arguments, or any others which sociology has here put forward on this point. She points out that "the stereotype of the witch is the mirror opposite of the stereotype of the saint", which in the Middle Ages was predominantly male. Perhaps the fact that the Devil was always male (though I know succubi were sent to test male saints), needs to be brought into the discussion, too.

On one plane, witchcraft was merely socially deviant behaviour with religious overtones, rather able to putate cursing and swearing. On another plane, however, through the Demonic Pact, the witch became that unusual and horrible thing, a direct and avowed enemy of God. The strange thing is, the spiritualization of the Devil, as Mrs Larner points out, in some ways is easier to visualize absolute evil than absolute good, though it is true that in human portance "absolute evil" is usually no such thing, but "simply the inverse of modest social goods". But in spiritual terms it is easier, since such terms are essentially pure anyway, to picture a perfect Devil than a perfect Devil. The rewards the Scots Devil promised his disciples were no fanciful dreams of unbridled lust or fantasy lunatics, but a modest betterment which reflects the humble aspirations of a peasant economy: "You shall never want" is a common formula. In fact, Mrs Larner points out that "the Demonic Pact initiated a standard feudal relationship", with limited economic benefits the reward for faithful service. What that service was to be is not entirely clear, but according to most preachers the Devil's main line of attack was the undermining of belief and the indictment of spiritual sloth; just these measures best calculated to frustrate the Kirk's drive for a gaily and educated conformity. In Scotland there was little emphasis on the carnal aspects of witchcraft, fornication with the Devil, levitation, the cannibalization of infants, and so on. Here the very intolerance of the church authorities may have had a levelling effect on sin; fornication was fornication, whether it was with the Devil or with your next-door neighbour; yet the Demonic Pact gained in spiritual weight because it was an obvious antithesis to God's Covenant with his Elect, which was the main plank of Calvinist theology.

But it is still difficult, in Scotland as elsewhere, to see why witchcraft should be dominated by females in no age when few other things were. Mrs Larner rejects the easy answer that "witch-hunting" was merely "women-hunting", or that it was connected with the lowly social position of women, skating with great skill over very thin ice. Leslie Alcock produces a singularly good chapter on Anglian graves in Bemisia, attended by certain wapsish scholars, and a group of East Anglian scholars, headed by Barbara Green (one of Myres's most faithful collaborators) continues the saga of the Illington/Lackford pottery workshop with a useful catalogue of the sites. David Brown writes on swastika patterns and, finally, John Hurst makes a surprise appearance with a fascinating summary of the continuity of settlement at Wharham in Yorkshire, showing the ebb and flow of a community's living patterns in one area from the Roman period (and even earlier) to the Middle Ages.

Without being unkind to either the scholar celebrated or to the learned contributors to this volume, one must regret that the net of friendship was not cast wider. This book reflects (save in one or two cases) an esthetic, not to say narrowly specialist, view of our origins which could have been broadened with greater honour to a scholar whom all admire.

## Bracteates, brooches and buckles

By D. M. Wilson

VERA I. EIVSON (Editor): *Angles, Saxons, and Jutes*. Essays presented to J. N. L. Myres. 254pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford. University Press. £20. 0 19 813402 9

Nowell Myres is well worth celebrating. *Festschriften* are a hideous invention, but if anyone deserves such a present it is this doyen of Anglo-Saxon scholars. The subject of the book is one dear to his heart and he more than anyone, has illuminated the early Anglo-Saxon settlers of England for nearly fifty years.

Much of Myres's work has been concerned with fifth and sixth-century relations between England, the Continent and it is fitting that five papers deal with such problems, or material related to them. Hans Jürgen Harnack writing about Jutish burials in Denmark and England in the Roman Iron Age, makes a rather odd attempt (marred by infelicities

in the English) to relate a detail of Danish burial rite to England which is interesting but not, so far, convincing. Egil Bakka writes about bracteates (largely a chronological study) and disappointingly stops short of discussing the method of manufacture of these objects, which, in view of the work of Arrhenius on bracteates and Jansson on Viking Age oval brooches, seems to ignore a major question raised at the beginning of the essay: did the bracteates come by way of trade? Peter Schmid writes an essay on pottery typology in the North Sea coastal area which will surely delight Dr Myres, whose specialty this is. The doyen of German *Sachsenforschung*, Albert Gensch, writes on a grave from Liebenau, which throws light on some details of belt-buckles in the Lower Saxon region. Huns Jürgen Harnack complicates the German roll-call with an article on inland metalwork from Lower Saxony.

Catherine Hills, with a fascinating survey of zoomorphic combs of the fifth century, introduces the English contributors. Vera I. Eivson, who edits the volume, writes on distribut-

ion mugs, skating with great skill over very thin ice. Leslie Alcock produces a singularly good chapter on Anglian graves in Bemisia, attended by certain wapsish scholars, and a group of East Anglian scholars, headed by Barbara Green (one of Myres's most faithful collaborators) continues the saga of the Illington/Lackford pottery workshop with a useful catalogue of the sites. David Brown writes on swastika patterns and, finally, John Hurst makes a surprise appearance with a fascinating summary of the continuity of settlement at Wharham in Yorkshire, showing the ebb and flow of a community's living patterns in one area from the Roman period (and even earlier) to the Middle Ages.

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### November Books

**Non-Fiction**  
**JAMES JOYCE'S ODYSSEY**  
A Guide to the Dublin of Ulysses  
Frank Delaney

Using archive photographs from the turn of the century and contemporary pictures by Jorge Lwinzki, the presenter of the popular BBC Radio 4 programme "Bookshelf" lovingly recreates the James Joyce city of 1904, contrasting it with the Dublin of today. Illustrated £7.95

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Hodder & Stoughton



## Puzzling it out

By E. S. Turner

LINDA HANNAS:  
The Jigsaw Book  
(boxed, with two puzzles)  
96pp. Hutchinson. £8.95  
0 09 145541 3

Surely the jigsaw puzzle must be very old? Surely it was invented by the Chinese, inspired by the labours of reassembling shattered vases? Not so, apparently. Perhaps the nearest the Chinese got to the jigsaw was the toy called the tangram, a square cut into seven pieces capable of forming scores of fanciful figures.

According to Linda Hannas, the jigsaw puzzle is an English invention. The likely originator was described in a London trade directory of 1763 as "Spilbury, John, Engriaver and Map Dissector in Wood, in order to facilitate the Teaching of Geography, Russell-court, Drury Lane".

Spilbury, cutting by hand in malagony, dissected his maps along the national boundaries. A smart child would soon find where to put the two Sicilies, the Desert of Barbary, Negroland and the Hyperborean Mountains (also Poland, whenever Poland happened to exist). A "prodigiously stupid" child, like the one encountered in *Mansfield Park*, might inspire the protest: "Dear Mama, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together."

It is no surprise to find that the jigsaw puzzle, in its first form, was educational. Anyone familiar with the table games of those days will know that indoor recreation was inseparable from didacticism and moral uplift. Taking turns to spin a teetotum, children won points for visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant and showing resignation, but lost them for peevishness, desire to be praised and tepidity. In "The Game of Human Life", marketed by John Wallis, the Romance Writer and the Satirist fell by the wayside while Tragic Author won through to the place of Immortal Man.

This same John Wallis also made jigsaw puzzles (indeed, he liked to give the impression that he had invented them) and a fine example of his work, "The Hill of Science: An Allegory", appears in this book. It shows idle children frolicking outside the One Language, which gives on to the Temple of Truth. On the way the pilgrim passes Confused Mummur (a rabble arguing), Self-Complicity Haranguing the Multitude (a boy holding forth from a rubbish heap), Pleasure and her Train, and the ominous Mansions of Appetite and Passion.

Not only did every reconstructed picture point a moral, but the mere

assembling of it was thought to stiffen the fibre. Mrs Hannas quotes Richard Lovett Edgeworth (father of Maria) who contended in 1798 in his *Practical Education* that a boy's character could be assessed by his method of putting puzzles together. Much to be commended was the "wary youth" who, refraining from the hit-or-miss approach, "cautiously examines with his eye the whole outline before his hand begins to move and, having exactly compared the two indentures, joins them. He is slow but sure and wins the day." The erratic Edgeworth had plenty of time to study juvenile natures, since he educated "twenty-two children at home."

It was a long time before dissectors could bring themselves to use cheerful pictures without a message. One difficulty was that such puzzles were proscribed on Sundays, though biblical and moral dissections were allowed. However, the puzzles were gradually becoming an adult obsession. In her journal the young Queen Victoria describes an evening spent putting together pictures with Lord Melbourne and Lord Conyngham - "the pleasantest, gayest evening I have passed for some time. I sat up until 1/2 past 11."

In Britain, early this century, the jigsaw became "one of the wildest crazes in the history of puzzling." Behind it was the firm of Raphael Tuck, which derived unexplained advantage from having Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on the board. Later Frederick Wurne joined in, switching staff into the jigsaw department from the publishing side, which was temporarily in the doldrums. Mass production of puzzles had been rendered easier by the use of cutting dies, plywood and the new chromolithography (America introduced cardboard puzzles in the mid-nineteenth century). Among the Tuck best sellers were picture-puzzle postcards, sealed in a folder with perforated edges. At the expensive end of the market was a 1,250-piece puzzle, issued in 1914, showing a full chamber of the House of Lords, a magnificent picture reproduced in this book.

The craze survived the 1914-18 war (jigsaws were thought by some to be useful therapy for the shell-shocked) and earned a new impetus when the railway companies, notably the Great Western, issued puzzles to passengers. A *Daily Mail* reporter described Pullman cars with partly completed puzzles labelled "Do not touch" all along the train. It is hard to credit that London Underground once had a by-law saying: "The booking clerk may stop issuing puzzles for any train if it is necessary to avoid delaying the train." Were there once *nibbles* in Underground coaches?

The 1920s also saw the arrival of a new form of whodunit: Harapp's Jig-

saw Mystery Series, with the detective-moment contained in a 150-piece puzzle housed in a slot at the back. These volumes must have been the bane of reviewers and the despair of librarians.

It is always (well, nearly always) a pleasure to be led down a historical byway by a well-primed specialist. Mrs Hannas is obviously at home with her subject; it was she who in 1968 inspired an exhibition of jigsaws in the London Museum. Who but she would have plucked from oblivion Daniel Wheeler, a Quaker convinced that God wished him to leave his English farm, but not knowing where the call would lead him "until one day his eye fell on the pieces of his children's dissected map. Seeing St Petersburg lying apart from the rest he suddenly had the feeling that God was calling him to Russia?" Obsequiously he set off and drained three thousand acres of swamp for the Czar. There is a monument to him at Leningrad, "though not to the puzzle which sent him there". Was anyone ever inspired to do great works by a chance crossword clue? What tangible good will ever come from the Rubik Cube?

There is little to query in Mrs Hannas's short, straightforward text. Not all will agree with her when she says that in the day of the Grand Tour "a man's social status could be measured by his knowledge of geography". In her view the fascination of the jigsaw "has something to do with the timeless dream of creating order from chaos". Today, she assures us, there are enlightened parents who, like Richard Edgeworth, take their children's jigsaws very seriously, "secure in the knowledge that puzzles teach tiny children spatial co-ordination, judgment and observation, among other valuable skills". Psychologists, of course, long ago latched on to the jigsaw puzzle and are reluctant to let go. The book mentions an American jigsaw called "Your Secret Self", composed of eight different colours, the final arrangement of which is supposed to be a guide to the puzzler's mental stability.

The *Jigsaw Book*, in a large format, is richly and fascinatingly illustrated, with many plates in colour (incidentally, what a godsend the continuing craze must be to certain popular artists, whose jigsaw rights are probably worth more than their table-mat and beer-mat rights put together). To wish for more literary references to jigsaws is probably unreasonable when one is unable to point to any; however, there was once a literary history of wallpaper and after that all literary histories are possible. The author does not mention the giant (48 feet by 24 feet) jigsaw of 9,000 odd pieces constructed according to *The Guinness Book of Records*, by the 75th Field Artillery Group, US Army, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, an exercise apparently designed to prove the old saying that soldiers in peace are like chimney in summer. She says the highest number of pieces in a single puzzle is about 40,000; presumably the "Festival of Britain" puzzle housed, again according to Guinness, at Montserrat.

The book comes boxed with two puzzles, one depicting a liner, *Queen Mary*, the other Beatrix Potter's Tom Kitten. Neither is easy to assemble, to put it mildly. However, it could have been worse: the publishers might have chosen one of these fiendish all-white jigsaws designed to sort out the spatial co-ordinators from the tepid. Some addicts would no doubt have preferred to have a replica of one of the Duke of Windsor's custom-built puzzles, with pieces cut in the shape of his Cuirin tervens. Others again might have wished for something like the puzzle illustrated on page 23, showing a recumbent nude girl, at work on a jigsaw, about to fit the last piece of two to a vinyl area of Michelangelo's David. No doubt there are rarer puzzles than that to be had. John Spilbury and John Wallis did not know what they were



This manichean moment is one of over 170 cartoons from *Chaval's Mensch bleibt Mensch* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, DM 7.80, 3 423 01709 0), originally published in 1970 as *L'Homme by Albin Michel, Paris. The French cartoonist Chaval (Yvan Francis Le Louarn), who was born in 1915 in Bordeaux, abandoned his youthful ambition to become a cardinal in favour of exhibiting his esprit noir on topics both sacred and profane in papers such as Paris Match, Le Figaro and Punch until his death in 1968.*

## The ad-man cometh

By Victoria Glendinning

POSY SIMMONDS:  
True Love

Unnumbered pages. Capa. £4.95.  
0 224 01895 7

You can't feel equally fond of all your friends nor be all things to all men. *True Love*, which concentrates on the amatory vicissitudes of Stanhope Wright, Creative Director of Beazley and Buffin Advertising, may disappoint those who are more amused by the problems of George Weber, Senior Lecturer in Liberal Studies at the Poly. (But then Posy Simmonds's last book of cartoons was called *Mrs Weber's Diary*, so it was time to give the Stanhope Wrights an innings.) There will also be some people who do not even know who George and Stanhope are. Those people do not read the *Guardian*, in which these characters drawn in line and words by Posy Simmonds, appear weekly.

The English gentleman used to read *The Times* at breakfast, with his wife flicked through the *Daily Express*. Later in their day they would swap. They both liked Osbert Lancaster's Lady Littlehampton cartoons because she and her husband were so like most of the people they knew. Nowadays the English gentleman still reads *The Times*, but the second paper in the household is more likely to be the *Daily Mail*. But the point is that the people the Littlehamptons resembled were not only the up-market sections of the *Express* readership in general but the individual readers themselves. Only one acknowledges that kind of identification here.

Posy Simmonds's strip-cartoon characters are similarly tailored for *Guardian* readers. The jokes neatly divided between the high-minded old-styled Guardianesque - the Webers - and the more worldly wine-bar types epitomized by the Wrights. Whichever way you look at it, *Guardian* readers are delighted to laugh at themselves, even though they may distance the fact by laughing at people who are just like people they know. Wendy Weber, George's wife, is the most sympathetic of these comic creations: lank-haired, bespectacled mother of six, so weighed down with whole food and good faith that her face has grown as long as a boot, she has never been all

things to any man except George; in this book she is seen briefly weeping, during the avant-garde movie he has dragged her to, at the thought of lost lust. George is generally too anxious about skulduggery in his Department to do much effective lust.

Not so the dreadful Stanhope. At the office party his leers cause spitting Janice, the secretary, to fall in love with him; her subsequent fantasies are drawn in this style of true-romance teenage comics. But Stanhope himself is after the astrigent Victoria Medlicott, a member of his Creative Department; his fantasies are elegantly visualized in the style of eighteenth-century French pastoral. Stanhope's second wife, Trish, who believes in Open Marriage and calmly waits up for him - working on her translation of an art-catalogue from the German - is very understanding. Or is she?

The dénouement involves the shooting of a soup commercial at Stanhope's country cottage, a flock of sheep, and a Stilton cheese. It doesn't matter. The best of the book is in the detail, often in the drawings themselves, such as the crumpled party-hose wrappings in Janice's typist's waste-paper basket, or the fact that when gaily Stanhope slinks under the duvet beside Trish you can see the title of the book he has brought to bed with him - *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. Sometimes the humour is nicely subtle. Stanhope, on his way to an assignment with the demanding and creative Vicky, wonders whether or not to remove the child-seat from the back of his car. Not because they might use the back seat (pastoral convention would not allow that) but because of the coo domestic implication. Loyally, he leaves it in place. Sometimes there is a nursery surrealism, as when Janice, fantasizing about rescuing Stanhope from the frenzied flock of sheep, produces in her dream the one thing that will put them to flight, and "a pungent smell of MINT SAUCE wafts over the angry sheep, stirring in them the terrible race memory of a million Sundays..."

The opening line of the story is "It is a few days before Christmas". The staff of the advertising agency are singing carols to the boss. "Bring me flesh and bring me wine" they howl in horrid unison, and "Frosty wind made moan". There is a frosty wind of cynicism moaning through all Posy Simmonds's fun. Just the thing for the coming festive season. Which is, of course, the idea.

## Southern kin and connections

By Jennifer Uglow

CAROLINE GORDON:

The Collected Stories of Caroline Gordon  
Introduced by Robert Penn Warren  
351pp. Faber. £9.75.  
0 571 12033 4

It is nearly twenty years since the publication of *Old Red and Other Stories* (1963), and the appearance of this new collected edition may introduce Caroline Gordon's work to a new circle of readers. Her name is so frequently encountered in lists of "writers of the Southern Renaissance" or bracketed with "women writers of the South" - Ellen Glasgow, Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor - that the impact of her highly individual talent may come as a shock, especially as her qualities are, perhaps, more clearly demonstrated in these tales, dramatic, densely symbolic stories than in the more discursive novels.

This volume contains twenty-three stories, written chiefly between 1930 and 1954. Almost all are set on the Kentucky-Tennessee borders where Caroline Gordon was born in 1895, where she grew up and to which she has constantly returned. She began her career in journalism, meeting Allen Tate (her husband from 1924 to 1959) while reviewing the poetry of the fugitive group for the *Chattanooga News*. She went with Tate to France, an experience also reflected in these stories, and in Paris acted briefly as secretary to Ford Madox Ford, who encouraged her attempts at writing with "extraordinary generosity". But her literary career did not really begin until her return to the South in 1930.

One regret about the present collection is that it includes her first work, "Summer Dust" (1929), not in its original form but only in the revised version "One Against Thebes", written after her conversion to Roman Catholicism. A comparison of the two would illustrate not only her increasing deftness and economy but also the way in which the enduring theme of longing for an ideal existence, and for a correct posture towards life, becomes transmuted into the desire for a regenerating religious experience.

From the start one is aware in Gordon's fiction of a decisive, directing set of values. Indeed, her insistent conservatism seems to demand a personal response, and although it is hard to resist the narrative strength which compels sympathy with her protagonists, I confess to a deep unease at the nostalgia for past certainties which pervades each story. This traditionalism embraces both a Faulknerian yearning for a lost relationship with the land, and also a social vision, of a world where men and women followed (although unhappily), and where one could celebrate the closeness of black and white without questioning the juxtaposition of cabin and colonial mansion: "A fine nigger, Ben... the only man really that he'd ever cared to take fishing with him".

At times the individual voice does echo that of the "group". The pre-war stories, in particular, are coloured by the views of the Agrarians as expressed in *I'll Take My Stand* (1931), in which a defence of Southern culture is suggested by advocacy of a return to the values of a rural economy in opposition to the mechanized capitalism of the North. Especially in the stories featuring Aleck Maury, one senses the opposition later defined by Tate in "The New Provincialism" (1945) between a public conscience which looks to "material welfare and legal justice" and private integrity. For "the classical-Christian work... based on the regional consciousness - honour, truth, imagination, human dignity and limited acquisitiveness - could alone justify a social order, however rich and efficient it might be; and could do much to reform an order dilapidated and corrupt, like the South today, if a few people passionately hold those beliefs."

Gordon's fiction compels notice partly because of the tension between this vanishing, perhaps illusory, order and the uglier, more complicated world in which her characters are forced to operate. The short stories are full of people in flight. In "The Captive", Jinny Wyley is literally on the run from the Indians, but equally suggestive is the flight of Miss Fiqua in "All Loves Love the Spring", who escapes the oppression of her narrow life and her mother's smothering room to hunt for mushrooms - "the folks in town all say I'm going to poison myself" - until she stands under the pear tree and watches its blossoms float "up, up, up into the bluest sky I've ever seen, and wished that I didn't have to go home". Home, the "bosom of the family" is an ambiguous place, embodying both the security Jinny longs for and the clutching mediocrity and worn-out traditions of the South which other characters flee.

Another Agrarian, Donald Davidson, has remarked in describing his background, "Like all such Southern accounts, my account begins with kinfolk and place associations", and in his affectionate introduction to these stories Robert Penn Warren points out that they are set "just before the breakdown of the sense of family". It seems appropriate that this carefully arranged collection should open with "The Petrified Woman", in which the frigidity and despair of a newly married wife and husband are devastatingly revealed to a young girl in the course of a vast reunion of all the "kin and connections".

An immediate refuge from commercial ugliness and emotional claims is offered by the natural world, at once open to all yet offering a uniquely private experience. Gordon captures a sense of reflective delight in landscape with great delicacy, whether the fisherman's idyll on calm waters or Lucy's pleasure in "The Waterfall", as she crushed a frond of sweet fern "and thought of the stream flowing secretly under the rock, under the dead leaves, making

But Maury, like the author's own father, is also a classical scholar, sensitive to the lure of another escapist culture, that afforded by the literary imagination. In many of the stories the significance of immediate events is pointed by reference to ideal worlds, to heroic and allegorical models - in classical myth, in Renaissance drama, even in the Green Fairy Book. "But where will we go? asked the Little Princess. We will ride on this cloud, the Fairy Godmother said. To my crystal palace in the woods." Even the desolation of the civil war is penetrated by the common dream, summed up in the soldier's ballad

And if ever I return it will be in the spring  
For to see the waters flowing, hear the  
nightingale sing.

But, as Maury points out, the pull of the imaginary world, "that fatal germ, *cocoonis scribere*", can lead to blindness rather than revelation. Gordon suggests this most strongly in her story of the ruthless shattering of a writer's narcissism, "Emma-nuele Emma-nuele", based on an

anecdote about André Gide. Often she shows the desire for an ideal life as destructive of the real existence, as images as varied as the suicide of the fisherman Bob Reynolds in "One More Time", or the mindless of the mother and daughter whose lives have been ravaged by the Civil War in "The Forest of the South". The symbolism reflects their dilemma; as Reynolds chooses a deep pool, and Eugenie clings to a dry mussel-covered fountain, so in "The Brilliant Leaves", a young girl seeking the depths of the forest to revive a fading summer love plunges to her death in the ironically named Bridal Veil Falls. The tone may range from caustic to mawkish but the dominant note is elegiac, and even in the final stories one has less consciousness of the consolation of faith, than of the grace of endurance.

Caroline Gordon expressed her own definite views on the goals of fiction in the appendix to the short story anthology *The House of Fiction* (1950), and in *How to Read a Novel* (1957). She defined a "proper" structure (Aristotelian complication and resolution), a "proper" subject (the conduct of life, romantic involvement), a "proper" hero (self-analysis), and invoked models such as Flaubert, Turgenev, James and Ford to trace the techniques of narration she particularly admired: "symbolic naturalism", dramatic rather than expository presentation, the perspective of the "central intelligence". One turns with relief from these unexciting pronouncements to find that her own stories, while meticulously crafted, entirely escape any air of academic exercises. Some, particularly the later works, do now seem mannered, relying too much on a melodramatic dénouement, or on heavily laboured symbolism. But the best have a quiet, matter-of-fact tone which depicts the nation so baldly, or from such a precisely defined viewpoint, that the reader feels less like a welcome spectator than an enthralled

lition to morsity than has an ugly truth". The characters - most of them at any rate - are not at all critical of society's arrangements, but the author is; she is openly a crusader for social reforms, but she avoids a haranguing note by keeping her one sardonic rather than impassioned. Benign obtuseness, willed or otherwise, is her target; but she understands how this quality can make life more agreeable for those who possess it.

What fascinates Ellen Glasgow is the paradox involved in the correlation between integrity and dissembling; in her novels it is always those of the highest moral character who are most reluctant to take account of domestic or social life. They become adept at pretending. She makes the point over and over: "Her higher nature lent itself to deceit". "... but she clung... to the belief that a pretty sham has a more intimate re-

lation to morsity than has an ugly truth". The characters - most of them at any rate - are not at all critical of society's arrangements, but the author is; she is openly a crusader for social reforms, but she avoids a haranguing note by keeping her one sardonic rather than impassioned. Benign obtuseness, willed or otherwise, is her target; but she understands how this quality can make life more agreeable for those who possess it.

In *Virginia*, it is embodied in the heroine's amiable mother who shops blithely in the old market at Dinwiddie (Petersburg) with never a thought for the horrors to be found there: "If Mrs Pendleton had ever reflected on the tragic fate of pullets, she would probably have concluded that it was 'best' for them to be fried and eaten...". Pity for pullets is not a sensible virtue since it's the custom to eat them; nor is it morally expedient to enquire too deeply into the living conditions of ex-slaves (the novel covers a period of twenty-five years between the 1880s and the early 1900s). What is to be avoided at all costs is the unsettling. For a glimpse of the Southern conservative instinct at its grossest, Ellen Glasgow goes back to the 1850s, with old General Archibald (in *The Sheltered Life*) remembering his brusque grandfather's words: "Didn't the Lord provide negroes for our servants and animals for our sport?" Sixty years later, modified by circumstances and tempered with benevolence, this view still persists.

*Virginia* considers innocence as an impediment to personal fulfilment, with the heroine - all natural simplicity and goodness - broken in the end by the very virtues her generation cherishes. Virginia is first a glowing girl, then a rapturous bride, then a perfect mother. She has been carefully educated: no breach is left in her mind "through which an unauthorized idea might enter". Self-effacement, the first requirement for

Michael Foley

Balanced between the worlds they desire and inhabit, Gordon's characters are often bewildered and confused, brought to recognize that experience is marked by constant betrayal, and that love and death are perilously close. Indeed violence erupts constantly and arbitrarily, often with cruelly unforeseen consequences. Jinny's children are slaughtered by Indians believing themselves to be in another man's cabin; in "Mr Powers" a father kills his child while aiming a blow at his unfaithful wife; in "The Long Day" a wife cuts her owl throat in a marital brawl. The experience of personal horrors so convincingly evoked in stories like "The Enemies" or "The Ice House", where two young boys are employed to hack out frozen skeletons from an old Civil War battle ground, is unforgettable, the private desolation within a sexual relationship suggested in "The Petrified Woman" becomes a general experience in the impersonal horror of war. The difference seems merely one of scale. One's lasting impression is of a nostalgia which can only look towards a hopelessly romantic redemption, much as the hero of "The Olive Garden" seeks solace in war-torn France by remembering the myth of Deucalion:

Far below, in the rocky caves, that would always furnish refuge, that could, if they were needed, bring forth a new race of men, he could hear the heroes murmuring to each other.

her. Unselfishness costs Virginia first her looks and then her husband. She has married a playboy who comes to crave "mental companionship" and intelligent criticism of his work, not the sweet inner comments Virginia supplies: "Her praise... only expensively supplied him".

This novel shows social forces operating on a single character; what's especially ironic and dramatic about the plot is the fact that Virginia should embody the Southern ideal of womanhood at a time when the old order and the ideal are both about to change. *The Sheltered Life*, published twenty-one years later, also looks back to the early years of the century (1906 and 1914), but it is less straightforward in construction, and a more impressive achievement. To begin with, it employs two points-of-view instead of just one (the author's), as in *Virginia*; and these - the old general, representing a mellow and civilized approach to living, and his granddaughter, signifying zestfulness - are effectively opposed.

At the centre of *The Sheltered Life* is an intolerable marriage: the home life of Eva and George Birdsong illustrates what happens when the participants in a grand passion try to settle down together. The effect on highly emotional Eva of George's incorrigible infidelity (unacknowledged, of course) is observed with sympathy by General Archibald, while young Jenny Blair (only seventeen in the final part of the book) succumbs to an infatuation with beguiling George which ends by eroding her feeling for Eva. Ellen Glasgow's objective, once again, is to underline the harm occasioned by self-deceits and wilful delusions, and to suggest, as far as possible, a wisdom, social parallel for the personal failure and tragedies her novels depict. At best, her work is authoritative and graceful, and her social observation is always acute.



# Waiting for the pin to drop

By Hilary Spurling

ELIZABETH BOWEN:

The Hotel  
199p, 11 224 60057 5  
A World of Love  
149pp, 0 224 60051 6  
Cape, £6.95 each.

HERMIONE LEE:  
Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation  
255pp, Vision Press, £12.95.  
0 85478 344 X

The Hotel, Elizabeth Bowen's first novel, published in 1927, already has its full complement of what you might call the Bowen clientele: wonderfully vibrant, husband-hunting girls (their worldiness generally designed, in here, to set off the guinevere of one ingenuitously intelligent innocent), ultimately eligible bachelors, washed-up spinsters, marauding widows and still more worrying married women, like Mrs Lee-Mitton, who would not dream of reading her husband's *Daily Mail* herself but knows, from long experience of human baseness, that the only way to keep it fresh, unrumpled and safe from inquisitive passers-by is to sit on it.

Whenever anybody strolled through the lounge with the air of exhausted resources peculiar to this half-hour before lunch-time, she knitted faster than ever and looked unconscious. Life had developed in Mrs Lee-Mitton a fine set of jungle instincts.

The mixture of enervation, aimlessness and purposeful, furtive endeavour is instantly recognizable, as is the bracing comment. One catches already the sardonic tones of Matchett, the housemaid, breaking her immortal household's silence to expound life itself to Portia in *The Death of the Heart*: "What's not said keeps," she went on. "And when it's been keeping some time it gets what not many would dare to hear." The faint trace of Wurzel Gummidge is a characteristic Bowen refinement on a figure who might otherwise be said to have points in common with T. S. Eliot's insensate bioprofession. Things unsaid and unsayable always poke up under the landscape, defining the contours and looming in the edges of what the author herself was the first to call "Bowen terrain". *The Hotel* is ostensibly the story of a girl escaping from the toils of an older woman. Into an engagement that fails to take a judicious piece of cross-breeding, arranged, as Hermione Lee points out in her *Estimation*, between Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and Forster's *A Room with a View*.

But far more interesting to Elizabeth Bowen herself as well as to the reader for whom these are glimpses of a lost world are the monstrous reckonings of exerts like Mrs Lee-Mitton, giving the brush-off to unwanted guests at a picnic, or the Hon Mrs Pliskerton settling the hash of the wretched, rash intruding fool who used her hot water without knowing whose bathroom was whose: savage disputes conducted often well above the victims' heads in an atmosphere in which you could hear a pin drop. "A difficult and thankless part, the pin," as Ivy Compton-Burnett said and Elizabeth Bowen continued in a lifetime spent exploring the pin-dropping tensions of family enmity, dislocation, the subtle and horrible embarrassments of the dispossessed middle class between the two World Wars. She does it in this first novel almost incidentally, without the precision and concentration of later books, but *cor bris*, with something of the fine fury of the disconsolate eleven-year-old, Cordelia Barry, who feels her life wasting away in days on the beach with Nanny and her younger brothers and sisters: "only like people in books who only exist when they matter. I think it is being in danger, in love, in discovery, in something and for that you have to have people. But people in hotels hardly live."

Cordelia's scorn might serve in

some sense as a Bowen manifesto. The pitiful gap between dream and reality – the treasure-seekers of fiction and the deal-and-alive denizens of the lounge – crops up repeatedly in her novels. It is the central theme of *A World of Love*, first published in 1955, in which a derelict, neuldering, gloom-ribben Irish household is haunted, and gradually convulsed, by a cascade of uncalculated love letters found in the attic. It is at its most telling in *The Death of the Heart* (1938) where no less than three central characters (including Portia herself) are writing books, in stark contrast to Daphne Heccombe – herself a magnificently genteel, lower middle version of Tennyson's princess – "six-foot high, grand, epic, hominoidal", – who works for Smoot's circulating library and treats books with a withering contempt extended impartially to the library's elderly subscribers. ("These were readers who could expect no more from life, and just clod to look in books to see how much they had missed").

The point is put both ways, so to speak from Daphne's cold and Cordelia's, in a passionate, memorably weird tirade (rightly singled out by Ms Lee as the best thing in *The Hotel*) by an anonymous spinster explaining why people come to hotels in the first place:

As winter comes on with those long evenings one begins to feel hardly human, sitting evening after evening in an empty room... I am fond of reading, but I always begin to feel that books are so bad; then of course I realise, well, it's not fair, is it, to expect a book to take the place of human society? ... Once I sat with the door open and, believe me, I could hear four different clocks ticking – I counted them – in different parts

of the flat. It's not, of course, that I'm nervous, but I really begin to feel – if you'll understand my saying anything so extraordinary – as if I didn't exist... If Cordelia in *The Hotel* is first in the long line of alarming children leading to Portia herself, and Henrietta in *The House in Paris*, Mrs Kerr heads a whole race of formidable dowagers like Lady Waters in *To the North* (her catchphrase was "A little bird told me" but "her confidante would have been an eagle"). The book's range does not take in ends like Portia's Eddie, the most frightening of all Elizabeth Bowen's irresistible, glittering vulgarisms, and, perhaps because the physical landscape barely impinges as yet, it has none of the icy predatory violence of *The Death of the Heart*. But for a first novel, especially one seen in hindsight as a lens focused on all that came afterwards, it is formidable: funnier, and suffused with a more robust, indignant vitality than Ms Lee seems disposed to allow.

This is partly due to over-scrupulousness on her part, a natural anxiety not to jeopardise her well-liked, fully equipped and energetically organized scheme of defence and reclamation. Ms Lee is at her best seeing off hostile critics, Marxist or otherwise, who have tended to get the upper hand in recent years with Elizabeth Bowen's reputation. The Bowen oeuvre turns out to have incorporated all along a full-scale critique of a society in disintegration and decay. The divided inheritance of an Anglo-Irish childhood, compounded by Henry Bowen's illness which sent his wife and daughter into exile in Kent, perfectly suited Elizabeth as the chronicler of people in transit:

evacuees, outsiders, hangers-on of one sort or another; and her sense of dislocation was confirmed by the war which brought her finest hour, namely *The Heat of the Day* (1949). Homely, however, is Ms Lee's strong suit: severe on the early novels like *The Hotel* she is by no means wholly satisfied even with *The Heat of the Day* and doubly hard on the sentimentality, strain and general "unsatisfactoriness of the later work".

All this is fair enough, accurate, interesting, and largely irrefutable. The pattern of decline and fall after a strong start and a brilliant middle period is after all pretty common among Elizabeth Bowen's (perhaps any) generation of novelists, and it is clarified here with sympathy and penetration. What brings one up short is not so much the matter as the firm, competent, decidedly flint-footed manner. Anything obscure or ambivalent is clarified, significant themes are firmly disentangled and meanings spelt out. Nothing could be further from the wit, compression and lucid subtleties of Elizabeth Bowen's own critical style. There is more than a touch of censoriousness in Ms Lee's *Estimation* as well as in her remarks about the "dismaying facility" of her subject's journalism: the concession frequently felt by academics for their feeble, unsalaried critics.

Ms Lee is no doubt right to point to elements of repetition and self-quotation in *A World of Love* (though, in a long list of influences, she leaves out *Cold Comfort Farm* which clearly slapped this festering Irish farmstead with its dank kitchen – "Mush for the chickens, if nothing else, was never not in the course of cooking..." – darkly brooding father, moodier mother, and restive

girls, its aura of incipient sexuality and, above all, its charming, triumphantly objective portrait of Elizabeth Bowen herself as Cousin Antonia, ably combining the role of Aunt Ada Doom with touches of the visiting cosmopolitan Flora Post). But she underestimates the humour of this and other books. Besides, she is not above a spot of self-purifying herself, in, for example, her elaborate introduction to *The House in Paris*: "The house in Paris has a name; it is 'the' house – significant, central – and takes its characters from the city in which it is found. That it is both anonymous and foreign is sinister."

This first critical study is not short on routine academic piffle about names or titles or books Elizabeth Bowen never wrote that might have been better than, or not so good as, the ones she did ("Portia's name invokes the woman disguised as Judge, if she were to be merely the innocent victim, the suffering abandoned female imaging Christ's sacrifice, *The Death of the Heart* would be an inferior imitation of the sensibility novel..."). This is the sort of thing calculated to make authors think twice before trying anything fancy: Elizabeth Bowen perhaps had some inkling of what lay in store when she described Verocia Lawrence, in *The Hotel*, as someone who "never" waited to grope for one's meaning, which instinct generally prompted one to offer her on the flat of the palm, like a lump of sugar to a pony. There are, as Matchett pointed out, things that go without saying and, after reading Ms Lee's *Estimation*, one can't help agreeing with Ivy Compton-Burnett that it might have been better if some of them had.

the family it is the schoolboy son, Kenneth, who takes the hardest knock. He falls under the influence of a vicious school-fellow from which he is only rescued at the end of the book.

As Julia Birley has pointed out in her introduction, this is a book in which the novelist used a great deal of her own family background. The school where Kenneth has a good angel who fails to protect him from the evil spirit is obviously Winchester, of which David Davies was an old boy and where Margaret Kennedy was often a visitor. Old Mrs Canning lives on Campden Hill, as did the Davies's. The house on the digan Bay is sited where the Davies's spent their holidays. Eve's Betsy's second husband, a grotesque dogooding peer, has characteristics recognizable in a family friend.

Throughout the book, however, children suffer and grow with a subtlety that derives from their creator's imagination. From Daphne, who shares the invention of Chinese tortures with a little school friend to Kenneth's hero, the brilliant Mark, their development is sometimes painful but always convincing. Even the birth of a baby depresses instead of cheering the ménage. It is only when Alec's daughter Eliza, the granddaughter of old Mrs Canning, takes a hand that matters reach the level of being tolerable.

The development of Margaret Kennedy's skills as a novelist can be seen in the characters of *The Ladies of Lyndon* are compared with those in *Together and Apart*. In the former the reader has to be told of traits and habits, while in the latter they become apparent in the course of the story. Similarly the emotional relationships in the earlier novel lack the inevitability with which Alec and Betsy realize that they belong to each other, but are destined by their own selfishness to remain apart.

It is to be hoped that more of Margaret Kennedy's novels will be rescued: *A Long Time Ago*, for example, is a masterly study of the relationships between children and adults *vieillesse de l'enfance* and adults approaching middle-age, and merits a new edition.

# Beyond the fold

By T. A. Shippey

JOHN BLOCK FRIEDMAN:  
The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought  
268pp, Harvard University Press, £14.  
0 674 58652 2

PETER BUCHHOLZ:  
Mittelaltliche Erzählen und Überliefern im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien nach dem Zeugniss von Fornaldarsaga und Eddische Dichtung  
384pp, Neumünster: Wachholtz, D 630.  
3 529 03313 8

Like Prester John, the *paradis terrester* and the Islands of the Blessed, medieval monsters retained a kind of charm even after their existence had been disproved. Othello won Desdemona with his tales of "the Anthropopagiti, and men whose heads/Dog grow beneath their shoulders"; readers of T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* will remember the battle between Robin Hood and the "Scythians", which ends with the one-footed Sciodop bounding straight at Wart, all pointed ears, slit eyes and poisoned arrow. Such patches are amused, slightly patronizing. In them the monsters have become indexes of the gullibility of the ages that believed in them and plotted them with such evident seriousness on their maps. John Block Friedman's book takes us behind this immediate reaction to ask why they were believed in, what appeal they had to medieval artists.

This latter question proves not too easy to answer. These men with heads beneath their shoulders, for instance, the "Blennyae", what kind of point could they make? In a modern science-fiction story they would be deployed as proofs of a more rational trend in evolution – better protected brain-case (almost immune to concussion), shorter nerve-pathways to the brain and hence faster reflexes, strong hunting specialization caused by the fact that the eyes are set forward, to see prey, not on a kind of turret which can be swivelled to detect predators... one can see a plot developing... but nothing like that could possibly occur to a medieval mind: it is too functional, Darwinian, relativistic. Accordingly most of the illustrations with which this book is plentifully supplied show an artist who has drawn an ordinary man and then painted a face on his chest. How the monster breathed with a mouth opening into his rib-cage, how brain and heart shared out the space – these questions did not engage the imagination.

Both classical and medieval traditions, in fact, are marked by frequent and formidable curiosity. Classical writers in particular were very like to regard any foreigners as anomalies on the edge of monstrous: the "dog-heads" and "Antipodes" ("opposite-feet") and his successors added the Pygmies, for being small, the Ethiopians, for being black, the "Wife-Givers", for sending their wives to travellers, and the Brahmins, for being wise and naked. It requires a strong sense of centrality to dismiss people from proper humanity on grounds as slender as these, and indeed to keep on believing across centuries that they are only have the one trick – the single foot to use as an umbrella (Sciopods), the right breast cut off to improve archery (Amazons), the habit to thigh to gnaw (Antropophagi). Why did the tradition of monstrous races prove so durable?

Mr. Friedman offers several answers to this question, including the disappointingly literal one that the races continued to exist. "The Blennyae", he thinks, could be a North African tribe who painted faces on their armour. The mouthless man who lived by smell alone might be a Himalayan tribe who sniffed options to ward off mountain sickness, and the Sciopods a dis-

torted memory of "people in Yoga positions". But while this might account for mistaken reports, it would say nothing about the relish with which they were taken up; and while there are some obvious explanations for that ("fantasy, escapism... fear of the unknown"), the strongest one must surely be that monstrous races – as distinct from freaks or monstrous individuals – created a taxonomic problem or category conflict particularly challenging for a Christian cosmos. *Alas over habeo quae non sunt et hac ovini*, said Jesus: "Other sheep I have who are not of this fold." But who did he mean by that?

One's answer to that, I am sure, depended very much on who you were. Friedman uses Anglo-Saxon and Middle English evidence a good deal in this book, and makes the point that English exemplars of the tradition are often very good and highly distinctive. The author of the *Libet Monstrorum* (if that is an English work) senses a "demonic energy" in the monstrous races which "angels, enemies of man, but interestingly cannot go all the way with it. Instead he ascribes them to the race of Cain, or alternatively to Ham, both to his mind intrinsically evil and hostile, but not of course inhuman. Later on it is not the dragon who causes trouble, but the thief who stole his cup. The English poet preserves a certain fair-mindedness about monsters even as he tells a story about a monster-killer. He does not look at them with the detached condensation of Pliny, or Albertus Magnus, or later medieval scholars; it seems likely that he saw in them, in however vague a way, some aspects of humanity.

This opposition between "central" and "fringe" views of the monstrous races is not a major theme of Friedman's book, which seeks to classify its very eclectic material into neat chapters on "Cain's Kin", "Manuscript Illumination", "Noble Savages", and so on, thereby losing, in my opinion – much of the value of a continuing, if changing, context for belief. There is a reason for his way of proceeding, however, in the fact that, after all, these traditions may not have involved belief, and may have been to some extent independent of social context. They were learned traditions, passed on from book to book, and where they did not engage with more living beliefs – as in the known as *Ad Paratres in Brevo* contains material much older than the thirteenth century (since some of it was translated into Old English, the vague ascription of it to "a Belgian" rests very largely on the reaction of a French editor to frequent mention of beer! If the part of this work quoted by Friedman were by an Anglo-Saxon, it would make a good deal more sense. In the speaker (elegized to be St Augustine of Hippo) mentions the Blennyae, the Cyclopes, and the Brahmins, but holds them up for admiration and emulation. Monstrous they may be, but also chaste, conscientious, ripe for conversion: "O miserable state of Christianity when pagans are the teachers of the faithful!"

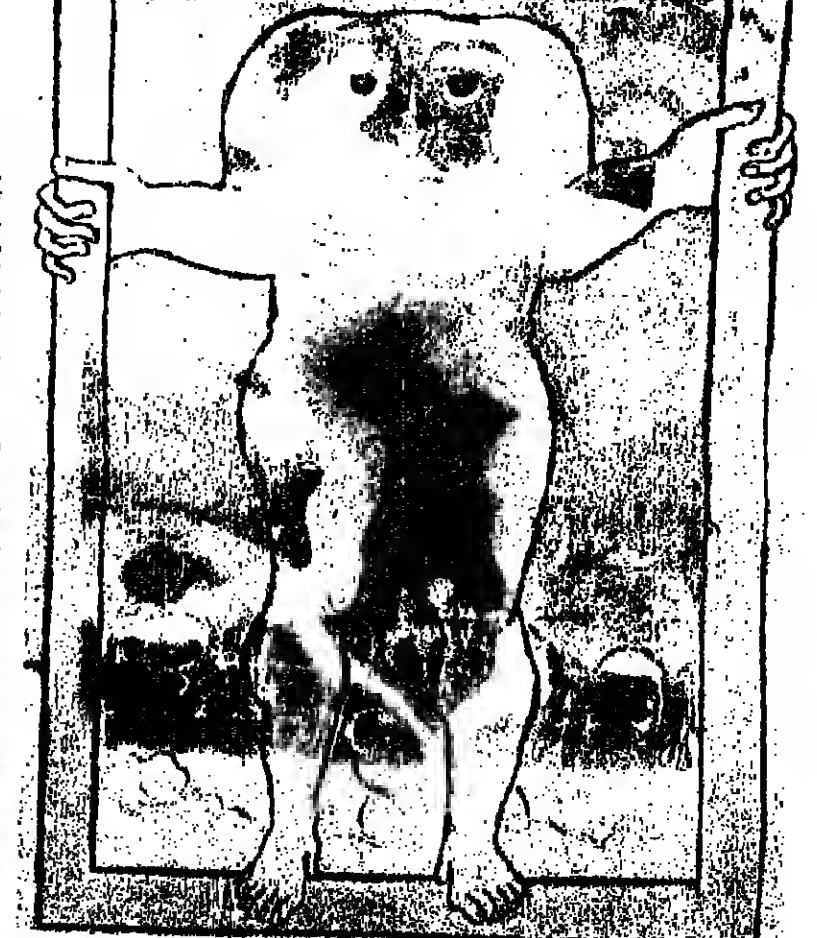
This note is heard on occasion in the letters of Anglo-Saxon missionaries, and in Bede, who repeatedly notes what good material the pre-Christian English were. How hard that they should be damned, by geographical accident! The Old English poet *Solomon and Saturn* (which Friedman does not use) is a good deal easier on its non-Christian spokesmen than its contemporary *Apology of Al-Kindi* (which he does). And the other Old English poem *Andreas*, a version of the apocryphal Greek romance "The Acts of St Andrew and St Matthew in the City of the Antropophagi", seems like the *Ad Paratres* sermon to be highly suitable for encouraging missionaries. Christ said, "Feed my sheep" (Anglo-Saxon bishops may have reflected); he did not say "Bog-ple at them", nor mean to open a

discussion on what grade of wool was worth bothering with.

These thoughts applied if the monsters were races or varieties of men, however abnormal or unpleasant – that is, if they had souls to save. If they had not, a more teasing category problem was created, once again particularly challenging to a Christian world-view, and once again perceived most clearly on the uneasy and goblin-haunted fringes. Had there been monsters in the Ark? There must have been (as I recall remarking many years ago to my tutor in Old English) because of Grendel and his mother. The Flood would not have bothered aquatic monsters, replied my tutor crushingly (though rather against the spirit of Genesis 7, which makes it clear that God meant to destroy "every living thing"). But was the Grendel-race human, and so salvageable, convertible; or animal, and so preserved by God's order; or – something else? The *Beowulf*-poet, like some of his successors, flirted with the idea that monsters are really devils, fallen angels, enemies of man, but interestingly cannot go all the way with it. Instead he ascribes them to the race of Cain, or alternatively to Ham, both to his mind intrinsically evil and hostile, but not of course inhuman. Later on it is not the dragon who causes trouble, but the thief who stole his cup. The English poet preserves a certain fair-mindedness about monsters even as he tells a story about a monster-killer. He does not look at them with the detached condensation of Pliny, or Albertus Magnus, or later medieval scholars; it seems likely that he saw in them, in however vague a way, some aspects of humanity.

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It is therefore worth setting them, for a moment, against a quite different tradition now almost forgotten, but brought forward again in Peter Buchholz's study of "Oral Narrative



One of the fabulous Blennyae, who, according to Pliny, roamed the deserts of Libya. From a British Library Cotton MS. One of the illustrations in John Block Friedman's book reviewed here. The group of Blennyae depicted on this week's cover is taken from a MS in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris which is also reproduced in the book.

and Transmission" in the Old Norse *forðaldsögur*, or "sagas of old times", those romantic works in which the normally earth-bound heroes of Iceland stumbled into remote regions of the North and East, to find themselves pitted against giants, trolls, dragons and shape-changers. The monsters in these stories, unlike the Plinian ones, are not to be looked at and commented on, but to be "interacted" with: a euphemism for killing and robbing the male ones (often possessed of magic, but probably fatal, treasures and weapons), and having rather more reluctant relations with the female ones, from whom many Northern families claimed or hid descent.

Many of these sagas deserve to be better known. How could anyone resist the charmingly-titled "Saga of One-handed Egil and Asmund the Killer of Berserks"? But Dr Buchholz make many interesting points about the nature of fantasy, on the edges of his male thesis about orality. To work in narrative, he points out, it has to have "set rules" – pulling out magic at all points is much too easy. And the monsters of *forðaldsögur* owe much of their appeal to the fact that they are under constraint, with day-to-day

problems of tactics and survival like, but not too like, those of humanity. It is a great moment when Bothvarr, "Little Bear", gets up from his seat in the hall under taunts of cowardice and goes to join the battle outside; as he gets up his "feth", the great bear doing such execution to his master's enemies, fades from sight and the battle is lost. Even half-trolls can feel in one courage. And giants can heal you with "her grass", wield power beyond their death like Ivar "Boneless" (whose corpse defended England till William the Conqueror had it dug up), or turn themselves into dolphins and whales, but they cannot live on air. When Ketil Haeg comes on his giant enemy's but, he finds it packed with bear-meat, walrus-meat and sated man's flesh, and opens his campaign by polluting it all, to destroy the base. In this one appreciates the play of fantasy, but also – it is the same moral as in the Polyphemus episode of the *Odyssey* – the lesson that monsters may have the brawn and the magic, but victory goes to the man who keeps his head. Like fairy-tales, the "sagas of old times" have something to say. Unlike the learned traditions of Pliny, they do not confuse wisdom with information.

# Union with God

By Valerie Adams

WOLFGANG RIEHLE:  
The Middle English Mystics  
Translated by Bernard Standring  
244pp, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £12.95.  
0 7100 0612 8

Mystical knowledges cannot be communicated. Since literal language fails him, the mystic resorts to metaphors in the attempt to convey the experience of union with God, and such metaphors are frequently taken from the language of human love. Wolfgang Riehle in this welcome study discusses the imagery of the *Song of Songs* before examining the language used to describe the process of contemplation by such writers as Rolle, Hilson, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Julian of Norwich. Riehle's early treatment of his subject indicates

directions in which further research would be profitable, and highlights some interesting questions.

One of these concerns the similar, and possibly overlapping, uses of motifs and words common to sacred and secular writing. Ecstasy as a state of inebriation has a parallel in the love-potion of romance. Union with God, or intensity of love for God, expressed as a death may be seen to correspond with the motif of sexual love as death; and in very affective texts such as *A Talking of the Love of God*, in which the writer banga Christ: "Let me now die in thy blissful arms... Into the love of thee," some erotic colouring seems inescapable. Riehle is properly cautious, however, about directions of influence, and degrees of erotic significance in the mystics' language.

He is severely critical of the *Middle English Dictionary's* neglect of mystical terms, but his strictures are perhaps not always fair. For polysynonym words the *MED* aims, by quotations, to provide a basis for

inference rather than precise sub-categorizations, and many of the words Riehle examines are problematic. A mystical sense for *ess* (the effect of emptying oneself of earthly images) might be recognized, but *dalliance* is found in both spiritual and secular contexts, and in mystical texts it is sometimes hard to decide whether its meaning of "communion" has erotic overtones, or whether, as used by Margery Kempe to describe her own dalliance with God caused her to fall to the ground, it is extended to mean "stasis". For *feling* and *fele* Riehle gives a full and useful analysis which goes well beyond what a dictionary could reasonably provide.

One of his stated aims is to supplement and continue the work of Hope Emily Allen. His detailed study of images and expressions relates Margery Kempe to the more "moderate" mystics in an illuminating way; and connections between English and European mysticism are noted throughout the book.



# Reflections great and small

By William Haley

J. A. GERE and JOHN SPARROW EDITORS

Geoffrey Madan's *Notebooks* With a Foreword by The Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan, O.M. 136pp. Oxford University Press. £7.95.

0 19 215870 X

Commonplace books have long been out of fashion with publishers. Striking and notable passages appear more appropriately in such volumes as *The Oxford Book of English Prose*. *Obiter dicta et scripta* are not in great demand. Commonplace books kept privately are often collections of truisms and platitudes. They are none the worse for that, if they give pleasure to their collectors. So much reading is passive that there is merit in the prompting to record jewels five or fifty words long, even if they are costume.

*Notebooks* have a more professional air. That is no guarantee in itself. They range from Matthew Arnold's, one of the most disappointing and least rewarding volumes to come from a great man, to Samuel Butler's two collections that never fail, no matter how often opened, to quicken a single line. The same page lists "Silver, month, depth, and false" as "Words without Rhymes", and Admiral Collingwood's "I do wish Nelson would stop signalling; we all know what to do." In this section is "Thomas Hardy told me in 1915 that Max Gate was simply 'Mac's Gate'; an old turnpike kept by a Scotchman." Quotations by or about Bismarck, Violet Bonham Carter, G. K. Chesterton, F. H. Bradley, Winston Churchill, and Confucius follow each other. For those old enough to remember Truman

Geoffrey Madan's *Notebooks* will stay alive for other reasons. He lived from 1895 to 1947. Eton particularly, and Balliol not quite so much, nurtured his interests and coloured his way of enjoying them for the rest of his life. In the 1914-18 war he served in France, Italy, Salonika, Gallipoli, and Mesopotamia. He was wounded. In 1919 he went back to Balliol, married to the same lady, but not appropriately to his wife-to-be. He was first met on the Provost's lawn at Eton - took to degree, and worked in the City until in 1925 an attack of meningitis ended his career. Thereafter his life pattern was set. He had a wide circle of friends, belonged to more than half a dozen clubs, and was an expert on claret.

In an admirably brief, compactly informing Introduction to this volume, telling us all we need to know (but they err about George Cloyne) the editors, the recently retired Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum and the former Warden of All Souls, record that

"The enjoyment of a private income enabled him to cultivate his leisure . . . The Madans' circumstances were never luxurious, but they were able to live a comfortable and discriminating life in London. Geoffrey became a connoisseur of wine and developed an expert knowledge of old silver . . . Books, however remained his greatest interest . . . As a matter of course he kept up his interest in the Classics, but he also read widely in English and French memoirs, collections of aphorisms, biographies, essays, fiction, history, poetry, newspapers (with particular attention to obituaries and Law Reports), periodicals ranging from school magazines to the *New Statesman* and *The Economist*, and even Parliamentary Reports."

Yet the twelve hundred or more items in his *Notebooks* have no smell of the library or the fireside. They are out and about. They bubble with life - gently. In a Foreword Harold Macmillan, Madan's contemporary of Eton and Oxford, writes of the "extraordinary refinement and delicacy" of Madan's mind. He remembers Madan's "slightly sceptical temperment" and "his exquisite good manners." These qualities grace the book. There is also in it a gift of style.

This is not the first time Madan's *Notebooks* have emerged from privacy. To the early 1930s he sent to his friends early Christmas small printed booklets of chosen items. After his death his widow circulated sixty copies in typescript of a selection of his notes, and appreciations of her husband by six of his friends. Cyril Asquith, Ronald Knox, Shane Leslie, Percy Lubbock, John Murray, and A. B. Ramsay. The editors of the present volume acknowledge their debt to these fore-runners.

The *Notebooks* are divided into sections: "Beauty, Point, and Charm", "Humorous and Memorable", "Aesthetic", "Aphorisms and Reflections", "Phrases and Descriptions", "Extracts and Summaries", "Anecdotes", "Recollections and Things Seen", and "Livres Sans Nom" (1929, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934). If this gives the impression of formality and a governing design, it will be false. There are grave and gay things in almost every section. Items in one could easily have appeared in another. They make their point wherever they appear.

What must also be emphasized is their brevity. Hundreds are no more than two lines, many a single line. The same page lists "Silver, month, depth, and false" as "Words without Rhymes", and Admiral Collingwood's "I do wish Nelson would stop signalling; we all know what to do." In this section is "Thomas Hardy told me in 1915 that Max Gate was simply 'Mac's Gate'; an old turnpike kept by a Scotchman." Quotations by or about Bismarck, Violet Bonham Carter, G. K. Chesterton, F. H. Bradley, Winston Churchill, and Confucius follow each other. For those old enough to remember Truman

## The muse among the mailbags

by Jonathan Keates

R. H. SUPER.

*Trollope in the Post Office* 135pp. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. \$10. 0 472 10013 0

It was touch and go whether Trollope would last as a junior Post Office clerk. "I have observed with much regret," wrote his immediate superior, "an habitual carelessness on the part of this Officer in the performance of duties." The postmaster general warned that "unless there is a great alteration in his attention to his duties, I shall be under the necessity of removing him from the service." He was accused of overstaying his leave and of having "brought the Dept. into discredit" and even when he was transferred to a surveyor's clerkship in the Irish Central District his departure from St Martin's-le-Grand was marked by a dual-up with a fellow employee.

Though the Office may have viewed the Irish posting the light of a necessary exile, Trollope himself, R. H. Super makes clear in his important book, saw it as an end to the shabby aimlessness of a solitary life based on lodgings opposite the back door of Myrtlebone Workhouse. He set about his new task with all the doggedness of a Johnny Rames, pounding on shirkers and pilferers and earning a name for swift, efficient mastering of the job. In the midst of everything he found time to write to his wife and to his friends, to his hounds and to his future wife, the daughter of a Rotherham bank manager on holiday at Kings-town, 1844. Married 11th June (burial) notes Rose Trollope; the groom, described by local newspapers as "son of the celebrated

fiddles while Byrnes roams. . . . (Paris 1946) will raise a wry smile. Prophetic is "U.S.A. won't believe in the brotherhood of man till bombing planes can cross the Atlantic." No attribution is given. One feels it fitted Madan's mind. He died too soon to know that missiles with nuclear warheads would be able to do so. The observation is even more valid today.

The temptation to the reviewer of such a book is simply to spread its wares out in the columns. Who can resist a smile at the nine years old Lord Curzon writing home from school for "several pots of superior jam"? Asked by a lady in 1917 "Why aren't you doing your bit to preserve the civilization we're fighting for?" H. W. Garratt replied, "Madam, I am that civilization." There is the Prince Consort calling at Farringford, finding Tennyson was out, and leaving the message "Merely say, Prince Albert called." There is Roger Fry's comment on Sargent's portrait of Sir Ian Hamilton, "I cannot see the man for the likeness." Unattributed is "Some people take



useless information can be interesting. *Esther* is the only book in the Bible in which God is not mentioned. Had Burke not refused a peerage he would have chosen the title Beaconsfield. The Asquiths in Cavendish Square had twenty-four servants, who all attended prayers. There are a few anagrams, none first-class; a list of the inventors of words now in common use; and a note that Wolsky "invented" straw-beds, and, errant, the Duc de Richelieu's myonnette, and Dean Nowel bottled beer.

It is good to have old favourites paraded once again, however fleetingly. Dean Inge, Meade Falkner, Peter Max Beerliem, the Cardinal de Reiz, Rémy du Gourmont, and William Cory are among them. But after we have enjoyed the tribute he has raised from them and a host of others, the two finest entries in the *Notebooks* are Madan's reporting of a visit to Italy in which he saw Mussolini in 1928, and his unforgettable description of Montagu Norman, the then Governor, on his way to the Bank of England. It would be good to have some other of Madan's own writings.

But we must be thankful for what we have. W. H. Hudson tiled one of his most engaging volumes *A Traveller in Little Things*. They can prompt things greater than themselves. Over and above the immediate and direct impact of these Notes there are the memories they may awaken. We smile at Madan's note that the "Duke of Wellington dis-

approved of soldiers cheering, as too nearly an expression of opinion." The stern old Tory amuses us. Then there comes to mind Pliny's request, when he was Governor of Bithynia, to Trajan that he be allowed to organize a fire brigade, a conflagration having done great damage in Nicomedia. "No," replied the Emperor; "men who are banded together for a common end will all the same become a political association before long." Subsequent history has justified Trajan's terms beyond counting, notably in Britain.

The three pages given to Disraeli, against a little over one to Gladstone - fair enough. Gladstone's utterances - far too massive to be quotable; though he does contribute "Queen Victoria 'strengthening' claret with whisky" - recall the voice of C. P. Scott, the great Liberal Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. I had said something about Disraeli. "He was a humbug," retorted Scott. "News-papers reporting his insufferably long speeches used to punctuate the columns of them with 'At this point Lord Beaconsfield refreshed himself from a beaker of water.' It was pure gin."

Madan's collection of Benjamin Jowett's sayings recalls the story of one of his last. He was on his deathbed, seemingly in a coma. It was evening. The small knot of people in the room were whispering together as to whether they should leave or stay. Suddenly the Master opened his eyes and said gently, "You may all go home. I shall do nothing definite tonight." Fact or fiction. It is true to his character.

Geoffrey Madan's *Notebooks* has plenty of such triggers to memory. They are a bonus to his own offerings. The result is a perfect bedside companion. Indeed it can enliven in any room of the house. Arriving for Christmas, it will stay as a book for all seasons.

we can see what Trollope meant. The blue book envisaged, among other reforms, examining the seven-year-old Post Office clerks in "proficiency in history, jurisprudence, political economy, modern languages, political and physical geography, and other matters, besides the staple of classics and mathematics."

An inalienably mid-Victorian quality in the lofty inclusiveness of such expectations finds its counterpart in the awesome profusion of Trollope's energy during these decades. James's generous tribute in *Partial Portraits* opens with the magnificent vision of "the great importance of these latter years" shutting himself up in his cabin on a pitching Atlantic steamer "for a purpose which, on the part of a distinguished writer who was also an invulnerable sailor, could only be communion with the muse". Thus *Barchester Towers* got written on a series of Irish railway journeys in quest of evidence for a parliamentary commission, and *Doctor Thorne* was finished during a postal mission to Egypt while Trollope's meticulousness was engaged in the timing of overland camel journeys.

I believe that a plan has obtained in France of fitting up letter boxes in post boxes at the road side, and it may perhaps be thought advisable to try the operation of this system in St. Helens - postage stamps are sold in every street, and therefore all that is wanted is a safe receptacle for letters . . .

The first freestanding pillar boxes were accordingly set up in 1852 at a cost of £7 each. R. H. Super notes felicitously that Millos, Trollope's illustrator, put in a personal request for the box all standing at the corner of Cromwell Place and Cromwell Road.

The novels are as charmingly unabashed in puffing such innovations as they are critical, by implication at least, of the systematic overlooking outlined in the Civil Service blue book by Trevelyan, Northcote and Jowett (the first two appear in *The Three Clerks* as Sir Gregory Hardlines and Sir Warwick Westend). However typically dandied his stance,

An early and honourable retirement in 1867, though it meant the loss of an indefatigable public servant, was not regretted by all. Edmund Yates, who had "very facetiously" proposed the toast at the farewell dinner, later wrote:

A man with worse or more offensive manners than Trollope I have rarely met. He was coarse, boorish, rough, noisy, overbearing, insolent; he adopted the Johnsonian tactics of trying to outstrip his adversary in argument; he spattered and shouted, and glared through his spectacles, and waved his arms about, o sight for gods and men . . .

Few other writers have been so wholeheartedly committed to the prosaic minutiae of non-literary work. We are unlikely to expect books on "Chaucer and medieval Forestry", "Congreve and the Hackney Coach Office" or "Peacock and the East India Company". R. H. Super's book, however, not only fills a sizeable gap in Trollope studies but, by emphasizing the significance of Trollope's dedicated scrupulousness in his various Post Office assignments, colours our awareness of his thoroughgoing professionalism as a working novelist. Besides making full use of the autobiography and the letters he has made a pioneer investigation of the relevant Post Office records. Cross-reference to the novels themselves discloses how densely, and in more than merely topographical terms, the experience permeates the writing: the fate of John Caldwell for example is determined by the proof of a forged postmark offered by the index-letter on a sheet of stamps. With its admirably informative notes and a detailed chronology of all the works from *The Mademoiselle de Ballycoran* to *Sir Henry Hoppard of Humblethwaite*, begun immediately after retirement, this is a survey of exceptional usefulness.

This is the argument advanced by Professor Mayer. It is far from being

ARNO J. MAYER:  
*The Persistence of The Old Regime Europe to the Great War.* 367pp. Croom Helm. £11.95. 0 7099 1724 4

Arno Mayer introduces this book with so disarming a preface that it is hard for a reviewer to take issue with him. His work is, he admits, "in the nature of an argument . . . I make no pretence of presenting all sides of the question". It is the outcome, he states, of a quest so "maniacal" that documentation of all his sources would be tedious. He defines his role as being that of a "Lumper" rather than a "Splitter", concerned to create a general picture of the past rather than meticulously to analyse it; and he asks, as did Burckhardt, for a patient hearing, for his book to be judged "as a whole".

It would be pedantic to criticize the book because it is inaccurate and unscholarly, and irrelevant to comment on its bias. The first two defects certainly make it all the more readable. It does not matter all that much, for example, that the Chief of the British Imperial General Staff in 1913 was not Henry Wilson but John French, who was born not in Ulster but in Kent. There are a lot of such nit to be picked, and nitwits will have a great time at Professor Mayer's expense. Nor does the absence of documentation matter in a work of this sweep, though one cannot sometimes feel wondering about the statistics on which Mayer builds much of his case. Are they quite so reliable and incontestable as he suggests? As for the bias, well, no bias, no book. It is as simple as that.

For Mayer knew what he was looking for in his "maniacal" quest. It is evidence to substantiate the thesis followed by Paine and Bentham, systematized by St Simon and Comte, that wars occur because of the interests, the activities and the value-systems of the landowning military aristocracy, and to show that responsibility for the Great War is to be laid at the same doors as that for all its predecessors. The thesis is an attractive one. The Marx-Leninist explanation, that the First World War was the outcome of the imperialist rivalries originating in the capitalist search for markets, never was so convincing. It was a war in which traditional imperial rivals fought as allies. Imperial competition between Britain and Germany was insubstantial, trading relations on the whole excellent, relations between their business classes close and often friendly. Whatever they were fighting about was certainly not trade. It was about something very much more fundamental: power. The middle classes of Europe went to war, as Norman Angell convincingly explained to them, in despite of their economic interests, not in defence of them.

A far better case can certainly be made for the explanation given by non-Marxist sociologists who sustained the tradition of Bentham and Comte, especially Thorstein Veblen and to some degree Joseph Schumpeter. What lay behind the conflict, they maintained, was not bourgeois self-interest but the archaic and militaristic attitudes with which the European, especially the German middle classes had been impregnated by the aristocracy which had effectively assimilated them. There was no need to look for new villains; the old ones were still there, as powerful as ever, pulling the strings to which the middle classes and everyone else danced. This was clearly the case in Eastern Europe, where militarized monarchies sustained by aristocratic courts monopolized political authority and social influence, obstructing such elements of the middle classes as they could not assimilate. But even in Western Europe, according to this thesis, the aristocracy remained the ruling, even if it was not the governing class.

This is the argument advanced by Professor Mayer. It is far from being

so strikingly novel as his publishers claim. The influence of Veblen, in particular, is very evident. And like Veblen, Mayer writes with a vigorous trans-Atlantic scorn for crowns, lords, courts, and all the trappings of feudal hierarchy and tradition that kept free men so long in servitude. He has nothing but contempt for the "splendid craven" professional classes who allowed themselves to accept archaic aristocratic social, political and artistic values instead of fighting for the rational standards of the Enlightenment. The artists of the Belle Epoque are no less sweepingly written off, either for meekly falling in line with traditional values or for cutting themselves off from their social responsibilities in esoteric experimentation. For literally no one during the period under study does Mayer have a good word to say. Not since Macaulay can a historian have written with such subtle contempt for the past.

Mayer's book is in fact part serious history and partly a political tract. Much of his historical analysis is sound, but it is too often obscured by passages that are strident oversimplifications, nonsensical, or simply wrong. Into the first category come sentences such as the following:

With rare exceptions French generals . . . called for a *levée en masse*. . . Specifically, the (French) three-year law (of military service) was to integrate and subdue the workers, the prime carriers of progressive modernisation, by forcing them into the army, the school of the conservative nation where they too would wear red trousers, obey bugle calls, and internalise the duty to rush the enemy in a paroxysm of patriotism and heroic self-motivation.

Ignoring for a moment the inaccurate fact that most conservative French generals mistrusted the *levée en masse* as being militarily useless and socially dangerous, Mayer's meaning is far from clear. Does he mean that the Three Year Law was intended to have this effect, or that it actually did so? If he means the latter, it is difficult to see how it could have worked quite so fast and - given the offensives of August the following year - quite so effectively. If he means the former, even if there is some truth in this with respect to a few civilian demagogues from the radical Right, there were no more serious and practical reasons for countering the huge increases in the German army consequent on their military legislation of 1912?

Into the second category, the nonsensical, come such phrases as: "Diffused, through respected opinion journals, newspapers and salons, [Social Darwinian ideas] permeated the common suppositions of ruling and governing classes in search of ideological underpinnings for their counterattack against the demonic demons." (My italics). Do we not here have a prize illustration of Karl Popper's definition of an unscientific statement as one that cannot be falsified? How on earth could one set about proving so sweeping a generalization to be either true or false? Indeed, what does this kind of waffle actually mean?

Into the third category of statements that are simply wrong comes the following: "[In 1914] the bourgeois [sic] did not shy away from what they knew would be absolute war, confident that it would be a forcing-house for the expansion of industry, finance and commerce and an improvement of their status and power." There is no problem about demonstrating the falseness of this statement by reference to the finance houses of nearly every European power and the commercial classes of the most advanced bourgeois nation, England. The evidence is overwhelming that most of them regarded the coming of war with deep apprehension and greeted it, if at all, only on the assumption that it would be far from total, that business would continue as usual, and that it would be over very quickly indeed.

Much of Mayer's book is fortunately on a completely different level

from this, and when the Dr Jekyll of serious historical study takes over from the Mr Hyde of political ranting we are treated to some really valuable analysis. He thoroughly makes out his case that the social, political and economic power of feudal landowning classes dominated much of Europe until the eve of the Great War; that "the amplitude, grandeur and exploitation of the world of land-lords and peasants perpetuated the primacy of pre-industrial forces whose political associates were at or near the switches for war in 1914. The position of the aristocracy, he rightly discerns, was "solid and awesome, not precarious and quaint, precisely because their immense capital was not only cultural and symbolic but also economic". The power of the middle classes, he points out, was fragmented by the rise of consumer manufacture, retail and service outlets, government service and a vast petty-bourgeois sector beyond their control; whereas "while the business magnates remained essentially solitary, the landed nobles were able to use their prestige and mastery to tie up the poor gentry and deferential peasantry to themselves." Mayer has many insights such as this for which much may be forgiven him.

All this is indisputably true of Europe east of the Rhine, but although Mayer provides us with some fascinating new illustrative material, what he has to tell us about these countries is not particularly new. Few if any historians would now quarrel with the picture of the Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Romanov Empires as societies where feudal elites, exercising almost unchallenged political authority through monarchies partly framed by constitutional limitations, overruled the middle classes and sought grim defensive actions against the rising tide of urban democracy. It is west of the Rhine that Mayer finds himself in trouble. He does sometimes qualify his wilder generalizations by saying "except in France and England". But to generalize about European society and to except France and England is like generalizing about the United States and excepting all territory to the East of the Alleghenies. "Lumping" can really be carried too far.

England is of course a complex problem, for in some respects it did superficially resemble the less developed societies east of the Rhine. The aristocracy had indeed retained their wealth, their land and their social dominance. They were active in both local and metropolitan politics. The middle classes, by sending their sons to public schools, socialized them, not indeed into the aristocracy, but into the service gentry with what Mayer somewhat sniffily describes as their "archaic ethos of heroism, glory and honour". But the relationship between the English aristocracy and the middle classes cannot, like that east of the Rhine, be described so easily as one of patron and client. The middle classes had been doing some socializing of their own ever since the eighteenth century. England certainly never became, in Mayer's words, a "bourgeois order run by a 'conquering' or 'triumphant' bourgeoisie". History rarely obliges intellectuals by conforming to such neat categories. But the bourgeoisie was not exactly subordinate. England was after all the land of Cobden and Bright, let alone Peel and Gladstone, and one can only concur with Mayer's description of Asquith as "the first Prime Minister to come from a middle-class family." If one overlooks Disraeli and Campbell-Bannerman, and regards Peel and Gladstone as "landed" because their bourgeois parents had purchased estates.

To suggest that the British court was in any serious sense a bulwark of aristocratic political power is also to carry "lumping" to excess. The court had embodied "bourgeois values" (and been despised for it by the old aristocracy) since the days of the Prince Consort, Edward VII and George V did not like the House of Commons much; they knew their bourgeois constitutional duty and per-

## Lords of destruction

By Michael Howard

When he writes that George V, because he "presumably" favoured intervention rather than neutrality in 1914, was thereby somehow imposing his archaic feudal values on his ministers, he shows a certain lack of comprehension of the calculations that led that liberal-radical cabinet to enter the war. Such archaic and outworn concepts as "honour" had little to do with it. What did matter were careful bourgeois calculations about national self-interest: to say nothing of a growing perception among the British of all classes that the value-systems of the German Empire were, *pace* Mayer, both deeply alien and profoundly dangerous. Bernhardt's *Germany and the Next War* had been widely read in England, and had not gone down well.

If Professor Mayer has problems with England, he has even greater ones with France. There was no king, although Raymond Poincaré, Mayer grumbles, "acted like one". (But it might conversely be said that the kings in question acted like President; and surely this tells us as much about the roles enforced on them as heads of rival and suspicious States as about their feudal value-systems?) The French aristocracy survived indeed, wealthy, reactionary and socially dominant, but Mayer very sensibly does not try to make them out to have been a ruling class, let alone a governing one. Their wealth and influence, he allows, was no match for that of untitled merchants, manufacturers, bankers and industrialists. The Senate was "rooted in small towns whose economic and social and cultural moderation was sustained by the large farmers and small peasants of the surrounding countryside". Politicians, civil servants, even the bulk of the officer-corps were drawn from the middle classes. All this Mayer freely admits. How then does he fit France into "the old regime" in Europe?

He does so, I am afraid, by fudging the issue. He introduces the term "agrarian" and uses it interchangeably with "feudal". Because France was a predominantly agrarian society she belonged, in his view, to the old order, even though the power, the privileges and to a large extent the possessions of the feudal caste had been smashed a hundred years before. The French peasantry and rural bourgeoisie, with their conservatism and "moderation" are simply "lumped" with the privileged, arrogant and embattled nobility east of the Rhine as if the Revolution had never occurred at all. In Mayer's political spectrum there are clearly only two colours: the red of urban radicalism (good) and the black of rural conservatism (bad).

When he leaves Britain and France out of account, his thesis thus has limited validity, and when he tries to

include them he is unconvincing. After all, the first decade of the new century saw both in France and Britain the advent of radical governments based on quasi-universal suffrage that were attacking the survivors of the old order with unprecedented vigour. In France they destroyed the lingering clerico-aristocratic privileges in education and the Army. In Britain they imposed crushing burdens on landed property and emasculated the House of Lords. Can it seriously be maintained that the way in which these governments reacted in the German challenge posed by the Tanager and Agadir crises (for the French) and the Tirpitz naval building programme (for the British) was determined by archaic aristocratic concepts? Would socialist governments have behaved any differently? It was not a British aristocrat who complained in 1910 that he could not understand "what the British government and people are about in allowing Germany to creep up to them so closely in naval armaments". It was the good German socialist democrat, Auguste Bebel.

Finally, the militarism of European society was too complex a phenomenon to be explained in terms of the old order seeking "ideational underpinnings". The aristocratic support for such bodies as the Pan-German League, the Christian Socialists of Vienna or such French fighting organizations as the Action Française was inconceivable compared with that of the lower middle classes, whose petty-bourgeois authoritarianism foreshadowed the populist and racist structures of twentieth-century fascism rather than the ordered hierarchies of the past. In England the militarism of the popular press owed nothing to the influence of the landed aristocracy, and in the Conservative Party the old aristocratic groups were being elbowed roughly aside by the new self-made men, Beaverbrook and Bonar Law. In Eastern Europe resistance to national self-determination came not just from the old landed classes but from rival nationalist bourgeois and peasant groups. Indeed the more the old order in Vienna yielded to their demands for self-government the more ungovernable the empire became. It was not just the "venerable elites bent on prolonging their privileged life", as Mayer argues, that were responsible for the final smash-up at Sarajevo, but also the German radicals whose anti-Slav violence made Vienna ungovernable, and the petty Magyar squires who ruled so unyieldingly in Budapest.

European society, in short, had become too diverse to yield to the simplistic analytic concepts of Benthamite radicalism or primitive Marxism. Perhaps it always was. It has certainly remained so ever since.

### Facsimile

## The Winchester Anthology

BL Additional MS 60577

The Winchester Anthology was in private hands and its existence known only to a few scholars when it came up for sale at Sotheby's in 1979; it is now in the British Library. It is one of the major anthologies of the medieval period, and includes several texts which were previously unknown.

The manuscript was probably written by a monk of St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, in the last quarter of the 15th century. It contains over 200 items of verse and prose in either English or Latin (except for two in French), covering a wide range of interest: pedagogic, religious, moral, scientific, musical and courtly. Particularly significant is the evidence of contact with Italian humanism and Anglo-Burgundian clerical chivalry. Later 16th-century owners added further verse and prose, and important musical items.

EDWARD WILSON provides a full introduction and lists the contents in detail. IAIN PENLON discusses the music. 512pp (454pp facsimile), 234 x 156mm, 8 illustrations. £90

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# Cold steel on the Western Front

By Brian Bond

RICHARD HOLMES:

The Little Field-Marshal: Sir John French  
427pp. Cnpe. £12.50.  
0 224 01575 3

Those unashamedly patriotic publications *With the Flag to Pretoria* and *The War Illustrated* were my earliest acquaintance with military history, and high on the list of heroes enshrined in their pages were the legendary names of Haig, French and Kitchener. Revision against the slaughter of the First World War, loss of empire, and the advent of a new generation of colourful and controversial generals caused the reputations of all three to decline, but hitherto Sir John French has been the unluckiest in his treatment by historians. Unlike Haig he did not maintain a dignified silence in post-1918 controversies, but published in 1919 a bitter and inaccurate polemic *1914*, largely "ghosted" by a journalist, Lovat Fraser. Subsequent well-intended but unscholarly publications by his younger son Gerald only served to fan the flames, and French was also unlucky in the longevity of enemies such as Hubert Cough and the official historian Sir James Edmonds. Recent well-publicized disputes among his descendants about family heirlooms, accompanied by fresh evidence of the field marshal's mortal infidelities, have made it even harder to appreciate why his reputation once stood so high.

By contrast Kitchener had the good fortune, in historiographical terms, to die a hero's death in 1916 before his short-comings as a strategist had become public knowledge, and within four years Sir George Arthur had meticulously recorded his achievements in three volumes. In 1958 Sir Philip Magnus published his polished and perceptive *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist*, and in 1977 George Cassar provided a painstaking, massively documented study sub-titled *Architect of Victory*. Haig has probably been best served of the three: first by the recollections of admiring staff officers such as Charteris; then by Duff Cooper's sympathetic and well-written two-volume biography (1935); by Robert (now Lord) Blake's skilful edition of the *Private Papers* (1952); and by the indefatigable championing of John Terraine ever since the appearance of his curiously titled *Hinge: The Educated Soldier* in 1963.

Sir John French has had his admirers. Lord Chelmsford wrote, "French was full of imagination and to my mind a man who might have done big things in open warfare. He was a lucky general and inspired the greatest confidence in his troops." Fieldene described him as "a great Commander-in-Chief, a soldier of the first order," and Escher quite simply as "the best soldier we have got". But his biographer is confronted with a serious challenge in explaining why his subject was so highly esteemed before 1915. Richard Holmes has admirably fulfilled this requirement in his well-written and sympathetic but by no means uncritical study.

John Denton Plunkett, French was born in 1852 near Deal in Kent but of Irish ancestry of which he was extremely proud. His father, a retired naval captain, died when he was only two and soon afterwards his mother became insane, leaving his upbringing in the hands of his six sisters. John followed his father into the navy and served for two years as a midshipman on HMS *Warrior*, but found he had no head for heights and was "far more at home in the saddle than on the quarterdeck". He therefore left a service in which officers could live on their pay and do the Suffolk. Artillery. Militia, joined the 19th Hussars, which though not the most fashionable of cavalry regiments, (they were nicknamed "the dumplings") nevertheless qualified their officers to possess a substantial private income.

The young subaltern was soon involved in a succession of scandalous

affairs and financial scrapes which could easily have ruined his career. In 1875 he contracted a disastrous first marriage whose brief existence and termination by divorce was so dashed up that apparently even his daughter never knew about it. In 1880, he made a far more suitable match in Eleanora Selby-Lowndes, whose family had for generations held the mastership of the Whaddon Chase. But this brought only a brief interlude in French's womanizing. In Holmes's words:

French rode with light cavalry panache all over his marriage vows and a number of other people's; he was fortunate indeed that his wife, motivated by a curious mixture of loyalty, affection and abhorrence of scandal, accepted her role with resignation.

Inattentiveness, aggravated by long absences from home, gradually degenerated into virtually complete separation from his family.

By the leisurely standards of the time French was accounted a keen and progressive officer. In the mid-1890s he was rescued from the half-pay list by the Adjutant-General, Sir Redvers Buller, and, with the substantive rank of colonel, was responsible for a new edition of *Cavalry Drill* and for the introduction of permanent cavalry brigades. He did not, however, attend the Staff College and remained suspicious of officers who had. On the eve of the South African War he achieved the coveted command of the 1st Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot, but once again his career was under threat - this time because of substantial debts acquired while on half-pay. He was saved by a loan of £2,000 from his brigade-major, Douglas Haig, whose motive must remain uncertain. This ethically dubious transaction has long been known to historians and *The Little Field-Marshal* contains nothing new beyond the fact that the loan was certainly outstanding four years later.

The South African War, which ruined so many reputations, greatly enhanced that of the dashing young French. His cavalry did well in the minor action at Elandsburg on October 21, 1899, and even better at Oorlogswater where he checked the Boer invasion of Cape Colony. Now a lieutenant-general, the fame of "fightin' French" was recognized in a popular ballad, the quality of which may be judged from the lines:

'E's a daisy, e's a brick,  
An' e's up to every trick,  
And e' moves amazin' quick,  
Don't yer, French?

But it was his charge at Klip Drift and dash to the relief of Kimberley that made French a national hero. On the debit side he had already displayed impetuosity of judgment and reluctance to abandon mistaken views. He also engaged in an acrimonious controversy with Roberts over an alleged lost opportunity to cut off the Boers at Poplar Grove.

Three years 1902-13 witnessed French's steady ascent to the top of his profession as Inspector-General of the Forces and Chief of the Imperial General Staff (for which he had been backed by Escher and Admiral "Jackie" Fisher as early as 1904). Although French's professional horizons were inevitably expanding, his chief interest remained in the cavalry, whose weapons, tactics and *raison d'être* were now under threat. Holmes devotes a whole chapter to this tactical debate, showing that French was not an extreme adherent of the *arme blanche* school in that he never advocated the abandonment of firearms and dismounted action in favour of exclusive reliance on sword and lance. But it was under his auspices the lance, abolished as an official weapon by Lord Roberts, was reintroduced in 1909, while the new edition of *Cavalry Training* (1907) also embodied the cavalryman's dogma that the rifle "effective as it can be, cannot replace the effect produced by the speed of the horse, the magnificence of the charge and the terror of cold steel". Holmes

does well to avoid the wisdom of hindsight of the siege warfare of 1914-18 in order to condemn French's views on cavalry as unrealistic, but the underplays the evidence cited by contemporary critics as varied as Ivan Bloch, Sir Ian Hamilton and Erskine Childers to the effect that the growing firepower of magazine rifles and machine-guns had rendered the close-order charge so dangerous as to be virtually impracticable in European warfare. He also points to the lack of any means - before the introduction of tanks - other than cavalry of exploiting fleeting openings on the Western Front, but he neglects to mention that, by March 1918, the Germans had developed very effective stormtrooper tactics. Possibly, the survival of large cavalry formations militated against such innovation on the British side.



General French

In March 1914, with war in Europe involving the British Expeditionary Force a distinct possibility, French seemed to have sacrificed his opportunity to command when he resigned as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the aftermath of the Curragh incident. Holmes's account of that murky episode is clear and persuasive and French comes out well in his concern to preserve a united army; indeed his only falling lid in his naive trust in his fellow soldiers and in politicians.

Henry Wilson, whose machinations behind the scenes during the Curragh crisis are here fully exposed, thought that French was not clever enough to be a Commander-in-Chief, but in August 1914 he was reinstated and became Commander-in-Chief without serious opposition. Sir John's instructions made it clear that he would be able to exercise an

independent command and would not be subordinate to a French general. However, Joffre and the French Government believed that the BEF had been placed under their orders and that difficulties which occurred were caused by Sir John's recalcitrance in defiance of his government. Holmes's understanding account of all the problems confronting the BEF in the opening months of the war should put an end to senior references to French and his senior commanders as "donkeys". For all his flaws of character and limitations of intellect, French wrestled bravely with the manifestations of unpreparedness that habitually face British commanders at the outset of war. To make matters worse, the neighbouring French commander Lanrezac could hardly have been less helpful; French had no faith in the commander of II Corps, Smith-Dorrien; and his relationship with Kitchener never recovered from the latter's admonitory mission in field marshal's uniform on September 1. With the onset of siege warfare the BEF's shortage of high-explosive shells became a crucial weakness rather than just an embarrassment, but French erred in allowing it to become an obsession. He acted improperly during the celebrated shell-crisis of May 1915 in briefing and encouraging Repington's vain attempt to secure the dismissal of Kitchener. Kitchener not surprisingly lost faith in him as Commander-in-Chief; his principal subordinate Haig had never believed in him. Knives were sharpened and private reports were made to influential ears, not least at Buckingham Palace.

The disaster at Loos in the autumn of 1915 proved the final straw, though French had consented to fight the battle out of loyalty to Joffre and against his better judgment. French must bear much of the responsibility for the virtual annihilation of XI Corps; it is ironic that his concern had been to protect the inexperienced divisions from heavy casualties. In December 1915 Haig succeeded French who took on the exhumous and frustrating duties of Commander-in-Chief Home Forces.

Holmes has had access to a very important new source which provides a unique insight into Sir John's thoughts from the early months of 1915; namely, the letters which he wrote almost daily to Mrs Winifred Bennett. She was a stately and romantically inclined lady who, during a passionate affair with a hussar officer. When the latter was killed in November 1914 Sir John sent his condolences and this quickly led to a deeply romantic union which seems to have brought strength and comfort to them both. She was later to visit him at Vieregat Lodge in Dub-

lin where, as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1918 to 1921, he vainly sought to break Sinn Fein by draconian military measures.

The field marshal's brief period of retirement was characterized by financial embarrassment and shiftlessness reminiscent of that of his early career. He had purchased two properties in his beloved Ireland but could live in neither of them because of the political turmoil there, and was eventually glad to accept a spartan *piet à terre* in Deal Castle, Leamthry sojourns at the Crillon Hotel in Paris so impoverished him that when he died in 1925 he left only £8,450 in his will.

In *The Little Field-Marshal*, Richard Holmes has been reasonably successful in overcoming the military biographer's chief difficulty; namely how to provide a convincing portrait of a man of action without digressing into detailed narratives of the operations in which he took part. A biographer less interested in military history would doubtless have devoted more space to his subject's philandering and its repercussions on his family, but Holmes is circumspect. There is one passing reference which would have been worth following up. It seems that French was a psychic for whom

the earthly bodies we knew here are only a kind of model in clay of what our real spiritual bodies are, and we only assume these real and everlasting shapes when the great change comes.

He told Mrs Bennett that "I sometimes people my room with these ghoulish friends - who have gone over", and this unusual sensitivity seemingly added to the anguish he felt in sending young men to their deaths. It would be interesting to know when French first became aware of this gift, if he acknowledged himself to be a spiritualist, and to what extent these experiences influenced his private life.

Richard Holmes's summing up is balanced and just. History has hitherto dealt too severely with French, stressing his manifest failings while ignoring his more attractive traits and achievements. He was not a great general and, though a brave and inspiring cavalry leader, rooted in the nineteenth century. Yet, like his own hero Sir Redvers Buller, French possessed that rare capacity to retain the deep affection of his men through all the misfortunes of war. Perhaps Wully Robertson paid him the greatest tribute when, despite his loyalty to Haig, he said that no other general could have held the army together as French did in 1914 when the BEF was at its weakest and the enemy at his strongest.

## The surplus from seabirds

By D. C. M. Platt

W. M. MATTHEW:

The House of Gibbs and the Peruvian Guano Monopoly  
281pp. Royal Historical Society.  
£18.25.  
0 901050 61 X.

W. M. Matthew has taken an improbable commodity, the excrement of seabirds, as the focus of a book about the business of financing and selling a monopoly product (in this case, nitrogenous guano) in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, he has studied the complex relationships which are likely to exist between the national owner of the product (in this case, the Peruvian government) and the foreign contractors (Antony Gibbs & Sons) who built up and maintained the sales. As Matthew himself says,

he has not attempted to write a book about the effects of the guano boom on the Peruvian economy, nor of guano on the agriculture of the importing countries, and clearly much remains to be said about both. He quotes in his preface the remark of Lord Ernie that "the supply of concentrated, portable manures... is the greatest achievement of modern agricultural science". Such "lowly commodities", he adds, have not received the attention they deserve from agricultural historians, or do they receive that attention other than incidentally, in this book.

Matthew is certain to be criticized by those who expected a quite different book. But within the territory which he has selected, the problems are sufficiently impressive and the conclusions of great relevance and value. After much detailed work on every kind of archive, Matthew concludes first that the business was handled honestly and professionally by Antony Gibbs & Co; but second-

ly, that there is some justice in the complaint that foreign contractors, while monopolizing so important a branch of the national economy, inhibited the development of indigenous investment and entrepreneurship. The relationship between the ministers and the foreign contractors was "mutually convenient, occasionally rather cosy... with the Peruvian nation as a whole largely neglected and ignored".

This is not a book for the agricultural historian. But it is of great value to the student of nineteenth-century monopolies, to our knowledge of the finance and administration of a major commodity in international trade, and to the development of greater realism in the study of the relationship between foreign business and the national government. Matthew provides both the evidence and the conclusions, and in a debate as confused as that over economic and business imperialism, his contribution is of fundamental importance.

# Bernard Shaw and "The Unknown Soldier"

By Stanley Weintraub

"And now tell me," Joan of Arc asks in the epilogue to Bernard Shaw's play: "shall I rise from the dead, and come back to you a living woman?" The idea causes consternation in the living, and its potential seems to have remained in Shaw's mind over the years, reappearing in its most provocative form in a play he never wrote.

Several nations, after the 1914-18 war, established Unknown Soldier monuments to memorialize the unidentified dead, the British placing a tomb in Westminster Abbey, where the body of the Unknown Warrior was laid to rest on November 12, 1920, having been brought from France the previous day and kept overnight at Victoria Station. High dignity had marked the procession from the station to the Abbey, and the King and the Royal Princes as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives of the military services filed into the venerable house of worship at midday to do final honours to the unidentified body.

The dread concept would eventually stimulate artists and writers, then still numbed by the carnage, and Cecil Lewis, a Royal Flying Corps veteran, did produce a play entitled *The Unknown Warrior* in 1928, inviting G.B.S. to the opening at the Arts Theatre Club. Shaw responded with a provocative postcard on which he suggested how he would deal with the subject. "In my Unknown Warrior," he wrote, "a desperate necessity arises in a future life to consult a survivor of 1914-18. Not one can be found. The Dean [of Westminster], the Prime Minister, & Foreign Secretary resolve to raise the U.W. from the dead by black magic at night. They find Christ seated on his tomb. He offers to raise the U.W. for them, and does so. The U.W. asks what they want in Germany."

The idea apparently teased Shaw. What began in his imagination, and when attending a League of Nations sitting in Geneva in the autumn of the same year he spoke with reporters about the French tomb of the unknown soldier at the *Ar de Triomphe*, and the dramatic possibilities of the theme. However now forgotten, the news then travelled quickly. In Chicago, Ashton Stevens, the dramatic critic of the *Herald-Examiner*, told his readers that he was scooping the Theatre Guild, then producer of Shaw's American premieres, "because a friend of mine very good friend of mine recently found a good find in a very talkative and confident mood at Geneva". Allowance must be made for the third-hand nature of the information, yet the details are striking and the paradoxes Shavian:

The place is London and the time just 1,000 years hence. Peace has reigned for more than nine centuries, the profession of arms is as obsolete as the profession of astrology. And the population, despite Science's many inventions and nostrums for birth-control, has increased so that, literally, standing room on the tight little isle is at a premium.

What can England do to relieve herself of this stifling burden of over-population in which, as Mark Twain would have said, there is not room enough to swing a cat? Graecia and Rome of men, some thing of a historian of ancient Britain, recalls the baggy days when there were wars to keep the death rate in tune with the birth rate. "We must have a war," say the great men of the council.

But how? Not in the memory of living men or in the tradition of wars are made - for 800 years how Englishmen have died only of old age or by accident, or by over-crowding, or by boredom. Apart from a few mistakes by the medical profession, no man has died at his brother's hand. [Then one of the council recalls that] in Westminster Abbey there is a grave of

England's Unknown Soldier. So, in solemn procession, these great men visit the tomb as thousands of years earlier the Greeks visited the oracle.

Headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, they file down the historical aisles of the Abbey and come to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. But the Archbishop is annoyed because standing by the tomb is an ill-dressed under-nourished man who does not make way for them.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" the Archbishop questions querulously.

"I am," the man answered, "Jesus Christ and I am here to help you. If you say so I will raise the dead from his grave so that you can question him."

"By all means do so, and pardon me if I spoke too hastily," answers the Archbishop, a polite man at heart.

So the Saviour raises the Soldier from his grave and the great men start to question him on how to make war. But England's Unknown Soldier does not understand their language and tells them so in a tongue that, according to an eminent philologist present, is ancient German.

Reports of Shaw's intended play surfaced elsewhere, from the New York *World* to the London *Daily Telegraph*. One version reduced the futuristic element drastically, but offered other details:

Time: A hundred years hence. Place: England.

In the intervening hundred years all civilization has been shot to pieces - commerce, art, science, politics, religion, have crashed in the debacle which Shaw had previously hinted at in *Heartbreak House*. Not only in England but everywhere.

The English Cabinet end their inevitable meeting to find some desperate play that might straighten things out. The human race is on its last legs. Humanity has entangled itself so fatally in the meshes of its own devices that there is seemingly no way out. In England, however, there is one last thing left - the respect and veneration for the Unknown Soldier.

This amounts almost to a cult. The Cabinet figures say that if they can revive faith in something they may be able to pull England out of this swamp. Faith in something, anything, may possibly save them. One inspired official is moved to the theory that if Christ could be induced to come back to earth He might again work with humanity through the still fervent emotion surrounding the unknown hero.

Christ does come back again (the mechanics of this accomplishment is still vague in my mind, as it may be in the mind of Mr. Shaw). When the Saviour arrives He is asked by the Cabinet if He would be willing to work another miracle. He replies that He will. They beg Him to raise the Unknown Soldier from the dead in the hope that here they may find the one last symbol that England may adopt, follow and worship. Christ descends into the tomb and, in a brief and touching scene, the Unknown Soldier arises from the dead. When he appears he makes a speech - a rather long speech, not one word of which can be understood by the waiting populace.

It seems to be a meaningless jumble of words - strange guttural words - until some scholar realizes that he is speaking an almost forgotten language, and out of the resources of his arduous memory manages to piece it together with astonishing results.

The Unknown Soldier was a German. Shaw was furious about the news. "I am not writing that play or anything like it," he insisted. "The account... is not accurate, but it is cleverly put together, and will do as well as the original. The ill-dressed, ill-nourished Christ is a senseless addition. In my version Christ was a perfect gentleman who apologized to the Dean, not of course the Archbishop of Canterbury, for his 'intrusion.' Perhaps the most important words in his discourse were 'the original' and 'my version', for they suggested that Shaw had nurtured a rather elaborate scenario which he indeed identified.

... the biggest thing I have attempted, one in which all the facilities of the theatre will be called on to their fullest. It's only an idea yet, an idea I've been thinking about. It has to do with this childish fanaticism about war - specifically with the Unknown Soldier." He stopped and gazed before him, his hands shoved deep in his pockets and that light, almost inaudible, whistle sounding through his lips again.

"Yes, Sir -" and I waited.

"I've thought of using the combination of mysticism and science



"It was a very young army" - an Imperial War Museum photograph of an unidentified British soldier dated August 22, 1914, just before the battle of Mons. At August that year of those with the colours, 46,291 had less than two years' service; by the end of November British and Indian casualties on the Western Front totalled 89,864 - only one officer and sixty-nine men returning from the Division which went to France 4,500 strong. The photograph and the statistics are taken from *The Mons Star: British Expeditionary Force 1914* by David Ascoli (250pp. with 37 plates. Harrop. £9.95. 0 245 53785 6), an account of the action in France commemorated by the first campaign medal of the war.

There was anything it stuck - for a time. Still, the belief that Shaw was working on an Unknown Soldier play was not quite dead, for an interviewer in mid-1930 resurrected the story as it had appeared in the Chicago version and was reprinted in the *World*. Shaw insisted that he had often thrown out suggestions "for fun", but that in this case the suggestion had not only been taken seriously but repeated with "sentimental additions and transmutations". Again he disowned it.

Fear of another and greater world war became intense in the early 1930s, especially after the rise of Hitler to power in 1933. Anti-war plays were already a staple of London theatre, with Robert Sherwood's realistic yet sentimental *Journey's End* the most successful and Sean O'Casey's surrealistic *The Silver Tassie* the most notable and least successful. Even Shaw, whose bitterness about the 1914 war had led to the non-realistic *Heartbreak House* and the prophetic *Back to Methuselah*, had returned to *Too True to Be Good*, his Malvern Festival play of 1931, to forecasting a rain of bombs from the skies and the destruction of cities. But after turning to other subjects on completing *The Millionaires* in the spring of 1934 he seems to have again begun thinking about an anti-war play that would rip away the sentimental facade which he had only lightly satirized in *Arms and the Man* forty years before, when he was a stripling of thirty-eight. Was it again only a joke?

To the American playwright Paul Green he confided in 1935 that he was thinking of a new play. Shaw was furious about the news. "I am not writing that play or anything like it," he insisted. "The account... is not accurate, but it is cleverly put together, and will do as well as the original. The ill-dressed, ill-nourished Christ is a senseless addition. In my version Christ was a perfect gentleman who apologized to the Dean, not of course the Archbishop of Canterbury, for his 'intrusion.' Perhaps the most important words in his discourse were 'the original' and 'my version', for they suggested that Shaw had nurtured a rather elaborate scenario which he indeed identified.

I am going to give you the plot of a play. You can do whatever you like with it. Here it is. The world has had no wars for centuries, and has entirely forgotten how to fight. Suddenly a war cloud bursts. The English are in despair and do not know what to do; they have utterly lost the art of fighting. It is proposed that the Cabinet go to Westminster Abbey to pray for light at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Arriving at the sacred

edifice they find the Lord seated upon the tomb. They pray to him to raise the dead warrior; the miracle is performed. The warrior, after his centuries in the tomb, rises! The ministers inquire him to tell them how to fight; the warrior does not understand; he speaks to them in German - he is a German.

Shaw was still working the idea out in his head. Mary Anderson took it as pure Shavian fantasy, meant to enliven the tea-table, but a Greek friend she had brought with her took it "in all earnestness" and asked, "How does it end?"

"That," said Shaw, turning to Mary Anderson, "depends on you. You can finish it as you like." It was as if he had impulsively invented the idea to tease her.

Miss Anderson took the story as mere impishness, and in truth Shaw rarely discussed his plays until he was ready to read a draft to friends. In this case, however, he may have been trying to talk through a problem that had kept him from writing anything down. Something much like the story Shaw had told to Paul Green and Mary Anderson was also told to Cedric Hardwicke, who had not only played the prophetic gentleman-burglar Aubrey Bagot in *Too True to Be Good* but had been one of the young English officers who made a makeshift chapel at St Paul had stood guard over the plain wooden boxes of unidentified dead from which the choice of Unknown Soldier was made. Again central to the play was the paradox that when the coffin was opened, the Unknown Soldier would be discovered to be a German. It was, Hardwicke thought a generation later, one of Shaw's "more mischievous moments". But one is not mischievous so insistently if the subject is only a long-running joke. Shaw had sketched in either the first or the last act of what might have been a drama as powerful as *Saint Joan*. There Shaw had turned his play from a witty yet gripping historical chronicle to - in its final scene - a flight of inspired and moving fantasy, as John Marinier, newly canonized, only to be rejected by a world ready to reverence her but still unready for her purity and zeal. That had been a dozen years before. Now something about the new theme - or situation - had embedded itself in Shaw's subconscious; but although he had moved long before from ibsenite realism to greater and more elaborate use of fantasy and extravagance, he was apparently at a creative impasse. "You should never tell anyone your ideas for plays," Charlotte Shaw had warned Sean O'Casey in 1931. Had her husband followed that advice we would know very little indeed about *The Unknown Soldier*. Not a line of it appears to have been set down.

In this play, making use even of an actual miracle. There's to be a big scene when all the people are gathered on a certain night around the Unknown Soldier's tomb where the sacred and mysterious light is burning. Through some proper device and in the proper mood, this Unknown Soldier will arise from the grave. I've only thought about it in dim outlines. To the horror of those assembled, he proves to be not a soldier of their own country but one of the enemy who has been buried and honoured by mistake.

He snapped his fingers and whirled around, and stood with his back to the fire. "I'm only considering it," you see. I haven't thought it out clearly."

In the autumn of 1935, after the Festival at Malvern, Mary Anderson de Navarro, an actress at the turn of the century and an old friend of the Shaws, was invited by them to tea. At first the talk was full of the usual pleasant trivialities exchanged when old friends meet, but Shaw apparently remembered that when the 1914 war began Mary Anderson came out of retirement to act. He turned to her, she recalled, with a "mischievous look" and made her offer:

I am going to give you the plot of a play. You can do whatever you like with it. Here it is. The world has had no wars for centuries, and has entirely forgotten how to fight. Suddenly a war cloud bursts. The English are in despair and do not know what to do; they have utterly lost the art of fighting. It is proposed that the Cabinet go to Westminster Abbey to pray for light at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Arriving at the sacred

1. Reproduced as item 663 in Dan H. Laurence (ed.), *Shaw: An Exhibit* (Austin, Texas: Humanities Research Center, 1977).

2. Quoted in Jeffrey Holmesdale, "Rating and Cui-Rating" (a volume of theatre gossip), *The World* (New York), November 18, 1928, p. 2M.

3. From the three-page typescript, with autograph corrections and annotations by Shaw, dated 14/4/30. In a private collection. Permission to publish the previously unpublished Shaw quotations granted by the Society of Authors on behalf of the Bernard Shaw Estate.

4. Ibid.

5. Paul Green, *Dravnic, Hertings* (New York, 1933), pp. 130-31.

6. Mary Anderson Navarro, *Moss Memories* (London, 1936), p. 218-19.

7. Cedric Hardwicke, as told to James Brough, *A Victorian in Orbit* (New York, 1961), p. 107.

8. Charlotte Shaw to Sean O'Casey, August 27, 1931, in David Krause (ed.), *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 433.



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## commentary

### In Psycho country

By S. Schoenbaum

Blow Out  
Various cinemas

Naked women in showers look like becoming a Brian De Palma trademark. In the high-school gymnasium in *Carrie* (1976) the heroine discovers to her horror that she is having her first period; afterwards, Carrie's unsympathetic classmates gleefully bombard her with tampons and sanitary towels - the film thus begins with blood, and blood will follow. Last year, in *Dressed to Kill*, Kate (Angie Dickinson) caressed her body with soap and feticcio while her indifferent husband shaved. The camera too caressed Kate, lingering over nipples and belly; few viewers, I suspect, found the illusion shattered by realization that Dickinson had undergone a temporary body transplant for this episode. Later Kate is murdered by a razor in another claustrophobic cubicle, this one a lift. In this way is all the reviewers' noted. De Palma, Monsieur Hommage himself, pays his respects to Hitchcock's *Psycho*. He is at it again in *Blow Out*, which has recently made a stir in America.

In the pre-credit sequence a would-be killer is on the loose; the soundtrack reports his heavy breathing, along with the rustling of wind in the trees - it is a bucolic college setting. The subjective camera zeros in on a girl's dormitory, peering into windows through which, along with the heavy-breather, we see scantily clad co-eds dancing, or fornicating, or just playing with themselves. In the communal shower room a girl soaps herself. Her door opens; in the foreground a man's hand grasps a gigantic kitchen knife. She screams. We are back in *Psycho* country.

There is a difference, though. Suddenly the lights go on in the Philadelphia mixing studio. There Jack Luce (John Travolta), a sound-effects technician, and his producer Sam (Peter Boyden) are taking in rushes of their latest film, *Good Frenzy*, made by the same team that gave us *Blood Beach*, *Blood Beach Two*, and *Bad Day at Blood Beach*. The entire opener, we realize, is a visually witty parody by De Palma of those sex-and-violence exploitation films that form the staple of American drive-in cinemas. A pair of cool professionals, Jack and Sam judge the scream feeble, and the wind in the leaves not so good either. The rest follows their pursuit, and attainment, of the right sound effects. Appropriately the movie ends, as it begins, with a scream. This time, as the sound-man and the producer agree in the film's concluding exchange, they have a good scream; a very good scream. It should be, recording as it does a woman in the process of actually being murdered.

Jack's quest for natural sounds begins near a country road outside Philadelphia. There his antenna picks up the wind-rustle leaves, a hooting owl (seen in enormous close-up), and a pair of lovers nervous about Jack's peeping-Tom antics; then a bang and air escaping from a burst tyre. This is the blow-out of the title. A car speeding along the country road lurches out of control on a bridge, then crashes through the guard rail into the creek below, and sinks from view. Jack dives in; breaks a window with a rock, and rescues a young woman, Sally Bedina (Nancy Allen). The fixated man in the driver's seat is evidently dead. Later we learn that he is the governor of the state, a politician who rates high in the opinion polls and has presidential aspirations: shades of Chippindale - even in the name of the dead, Wasshickon, glimpsed from a sign.

However apt, De Palma's title unfortunately duplicates that of the British release of Marco Ferreri's *La Grande Bouffe* (1973) - the one,

awash with vomit and excrement, about four middle-aged men stuffing themselves to death in a villa outside Paris. The film is well enough known - it took the International Critics' Prize that year at Cannes - and not readily forgotten. But De Palma isn't thinking of the *Grande Bouffe*; he has *Blow-Up* on his mind. In Antonioni's celebrated and haunting 1966 film, a swinging freelance magazine photographer (played by David Hemmings) snaps a young couple making love in a London park. When he blows up the photo he sees, or seems to see, a hand with a gun; maybe a murder is being staged. Enlargement paradoxically makes the image at once more revealing and more elusive. (As Pauline Kael was quick to note in her *New Yorker* review of *Blow Out*, De Palma had alluded to *Blow-Up* as early as 1968 in his dialogue for *Greenglass*, in connection with the grassy knoll of Jack Kennedy's murder. He tends to be good about acknowledgement in a medium which doesn't invite documentation.) De Palma's other principal cinematic inspiration - there are a number of subsidiary ones - is *The Conversation* (1974), Coppola's suture, but none the less riveting, movie about Harry Caul (played by Gene Hackman), an audio surveillance technician - what in less euphemistic times used to be called a wire-tapper - whose tapes disclose a situation which might result in murder.

At the hospital in *Blow Out*, Jack finds that the police aren't interested in his sensational tale. Nor is the governor's wife - why upset further the grieving family? Afterwards Jack runs through his tape at the film studio, and hears an unmistakable gunshot. He enlists the help of the girl he saved. Curly-headed, vulnerably good-natured and not very bright, Sally is a department-store cosmetics demonstrator and a part-time looker who makes extra cash by being photographed in compromising poses with unsuspecting local bigwigs. That night on Wasshickon Drive, her photographer sidekick captured the episode on film. Jack sees it on the box. When a news magazine prints a spread of stills, he cuts out the pictures, rephotographs them with a movie camera, and synchronizes the film with his recording. The finished product reveals a tell-tale puff of smoke arising just after the gunshot. Retouching has, however, eliminated the girl.

Jack delivers his sound tape, of which he has prudently kept a copy, to the police, only to learn it is blank; the bugger is himself being bugged. Jack isn't popular with the cops. Like J. Gittes, Nicholson's private eye in Polanski's *Chinatown*, he has a dark episode in his past involving them; but where Polanski is teasingly vague, De Palma is specific. While working for a commission investigating police corruption, Jack had set up a meeting between a lawman on the take, a mafia chieftain, and a police informant set up with a hidden microphone and transmitter strapped to his waist. The informant's heavy perspiring short-circuited the battery, betraying - with fatal consequences - his mission. The episode, brilliantly recounted in flashback, foretells the catastrophe of *Blow Out*.

The film has been understandably - but I think mistakenly - classed as a political thriller. People think of Ted Kennedy and the drowned Mary Jo Kopechne in the submerged car of the assassinated President, and of Watergate with its clandestine operations, cover-up, and erased tapes. *Blow Out* the right-wing look, who mummifies the dirty tricks but wets his high heels out of strangling young floozies, has struck one commentator as the sort of operator you can imagine raising a glass with Gordon Liddy on the target range after the day's work is done. But *Blow Out* is, after 'superficially' about actual events. After making all due allow-

ance for distinctions of genre, politically the film belongs more with *The Day of the Jackal* than with *The Battle of Algiers*.

It is film itself - the technology De Palma has mastered and the exemplars to which he pays tribute by imitation - which really engages this director. He is well served by his editor, sound mixer, set designer and, above all, by his cinematographer, Vilmos Zsigmond, who shot *Obsession* for De Palma, won an Oscar for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; his distinguished credits include *Deliverance*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, and *The Deer Hunter*. This time around, Zsigmond dazzles with his endlessly circling camera, his overhead frames, his split screens, even a passage in slow motion. In the night witch at Wasshickon he makes darkness palpably visible; daylight assumes an uncanny clarity.

Using almost a dozen cameras, Zsigmond goes to town on the climactic Liberty Day festivities. For the chase sequence, in which Travolta's car zooms into the City Hall and exits through the back door before crashing into the window of Wana-maker's department store, Zsigmond had the overhead work done from a helicopter rig. (The chase itself, in which Jack is trying to overtake a subway train, seems to draw its inspiration from *The French Connection*.) Murder and retribution take place on a high parapet of the Port of History Building. Then fireworks - furnished by the same outfit that staged the pyrotechnical display for the Reagan inauguration - light up the night sky. The scene may be Philadelphia, where De Palma was born, but despite the trappings of realism this cityscape looks phantasmagoric.

What does it all add up to? A lot, according to the *doyenne* of film reviewers. Confronted with orange tints from De Palma, Pauline Kael's *New Yorker* prose turns indecent purple: the film is "sleek and it glows orange, like the coils of a heater or molten glass - as if the light were coming from behind the screen or as if the screen itself were plugged in." It is "a great movie." I think myself she overstates extravagantly. Kael lauds Travolta as the reincarnation of the young Brando. On the waterfront. At twenty-seven, Travolta is a star personality, and has been ever since his gyrations in

*Saturday Night Fever*. Here he gives off an appropriately earnest intensity, but the part demands little more. For De Palma isn't really interested in character, nor in the dialogue which defines character and advances plot. At moments of stress or despair, his personages aspire to no greater eloquence than to shout "What the fuck".

Not does De Palma worry about plausibility. His story is full of holes. Why should an experienced hit man trust to a blow out on a country road? When a tyre bursts anything can happen to a car - including coming to a safe halt. One of the murders takes place in the women's lavatory of a busy metropolitan railway terminal. Yet, as the loudspeaker blares a departure, nobody is around, either in the lavatory or in the echoing corridors. The vacancy makes no sense; it merely satisfies a director's imperative.

Nor is De Palma one to concern himself with the wider implications of theme. In *Obsession* he was content mainly to recycle Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. With *Carrie* he managed to bring off a neat horror film which works well enough in its limited way. In *Dressed to Kill* he made the point that if you are an affluent, love-starved middle-aged housewife, you would do well to avoid consulting a schizophrenic transvestite shrink. Sound advice, no doubt, but as the bouncer in the old gag remarked when confronted with an orgasmic ordering a martini, "You don't see too many of those fellows around nowadays."

In *Blow Out* Jack's wizarly ultimately lets him down. He loses the girl he has come to love. Still, he gets his scream for his film. It's not much of a triumph, but the upshot may be reckoned as emblematic of a whole species of movie-making. De Palma himself has encountered the limits of technique. In the end he fails to get his scream from the audience. No compensating vision makes up for its absence. The failure is in large measure owing to the limp script De Palma himself wrote. Cineastes hung up on technique may under-estimate the characterization, dialogue and narrative; standbys traditionally valued in older dramatic forms. They do so at their peril. Words really count in cinema too; even in a movie which is in essence about the movies.

## The Good Bookshop Guide

By Lindsay Duguid

Heated arguments about how few bookshops there are in London, once W. H. Smith and John P. W. have been excluded, can now be fuelled by the evidence provided by Junction Books. *The Bookshops of London* (390pp, £4.95, 0 85245 042 X) lists 470 (for a population of about seven million) of which surprisingly few are both good and general.

The guide, the result of "incessant questioning" of booksellers by Martha Redding Pease, lists the shops by district (London WC, North London, West London, etc) and by type of shop (General, Speciality, Secondhand, Antiquarian). The coverage is comprehensive - Belzize Books may feel understandably miffed at having been left out. Each entry includes useful information about the nearest tube station, opening hours, mail order services, non-book, material and a general comment which is sometimes downright rude in the manner of *Time Out* ("... a small, grubby, disorganized secondhand bookshop... with nothing noteworthy about the scanty stock"). The staff are knowledgeable,

helpful and industrious but [sic] the shop maintains an atmosphere like those of the genteel 'gentlemanly bookellers'.

The lists of subjects stocked ("ground floor - astronomy, astrology, fantasy, Grateful Dead, horror") which are perhaps a bit misleading in the case of small general shops, show that bookshops (and perhaps books) are becoming more and more specialized. Many of the recently opened shops in the guide (which tend to cluster in North-West London - the best-served area) are devoted to agitprop, feminism, eastern religions and "utopias". One shop is called *Weird Fantasy Bookshop*, another *Dark They Were and Gold-ens Eyed*; but at least such names, like those of the longer-established Christian Literature Crusade and Protestant Truth Society, help the customer avoid a Bateman-like incident at the till. The fact that another popular speciality is children's books - a boom now apparently declining - perhaps merely shows that bookshoppers tend to lag behind publishers in keeping up with 1970s trends.

*The Bookshops of London* is clearly set out and well-indexed and would be a good model for a similar (slimmer) volume covering the rest of Britain, for use in arguments about the nation's book-buying habits and the decline of civilization.

## commentary

### The politics of the family

By Helen McNeil

All My Sons  
Wyndham's Theatre

*All My Sons* is too obviously built around a series of dichotomies: father and son, family and society, past and present, crime and the "star of honesty". The interplay of these forces produces a powerful double climax: first from outside pressure, then from within. However, Arthur Miller's near oppositions are asymptomatic of a confusion about the politics of everyday life which neither the text nor Michael Blakemore's fresh, realistic production successfully remove.

At the end of the first act, Anne Deever accuses her own imprisoned father of the war profiteering crime which we already suspect was committed by Joe Keller. Joe, a rough-hewn self-made businessman in the all-American mould, pleads with Anne to be generous to the "little man" who cheats under pressure: "Just try to see it human, see it human," he's referring covertly to himself, asking Anne, as his surviving son's intended bride, to put family loyalty above social responsibility. Joe is blind to values beyond the family and sincerely believes that he has done everything only for his wife and sons - including the export of faulty cylinder heads which kill twenty-one pilots. With a youthful rectitude Anne won't "see it human"; she sees it socially and has rejected her "murdering" father. Chris, the surviving son, stops this conversation because it may lead to a revelation of Joe's guilt, which he has been refusing to admit to himself for many years. However, we are encouraged to admire Chris's love for his father, whom he prizes as "Joe McGuts", the plucky self-reliant dad. *All My Sons* never confronts the conflict between family praise and family fault, preferring the social-family conflict instead. Michael Blakemore's production takes Joe's plea as its major interpretative line, interpreting what Miller called his "legislative" play as human family drama, realistically depicted.

Blakemore's choice makes for a powerful mingling of pathos and tension in the climactic family crises. When Kate Keller melodramatically points at her husband at the end of Act II and tells her son that if his missing pilot brother is really dead then the father has killed him, we are made to feel the shudder of inescapable family nightmare. Since Miller's obvious social theme of the war guilt of capitalism and the generation gap aren't today's issues, Blakemore has made a pragmatic choice which results in a satisfyingly contained production. By repressing the social element in the play, the production enables the audience to slide over many of Miller's contradictions to a rather too smooth ending which is provided by the convenient suicide of the guilty father.

In a personal and realistic production, tremendous weight falls upon the interpretation of character, though the more we become fond of these characters, the clearer it becomes that Miller isn't actually showing everyone's too nice. Rosemary Harris's brilliantly seductive mother does a lot to suggest why Chris, aged thirty, still lives at home, why he is never "fast with girls". This is an anti-historic, anti-social force, at least as powerful as her husband; she's a study for *Death of a Salesman*'s Linda whose transcendent faith in her husband Willy fatally encourages the survival of his illusions. "Deep in your heart", mother repeatedly says, "you know mother George Deever have been arguing, mother has packed Anne's bags."

Against Kate's methodical madness, Jill Baker's angular Anne hardly stands a chance; wounded but fecund, "the prettiest girl you ever saw", Anne should be a veritable Lady Di of the Sorrows.

Miller doesn't give either the Keller family or the Deever family much of a past. Joe has studied English in night school - possibly a Jewish immigrant at the time of the play - but the all-American mid-Western setting (well symbolized by a huge white and green house) doesn't so much anchor the Kellers as set them afloat. Who lives in the rest of that city? What are Joe's and Chris's politics? What has Anne been working at all those years in New York? Miller's family is contained in its

own back yard, so that we never experience the larger community whose needs we are supposed to weigh against Joe's peasant capitalism. Although the actors are kept busy in this production, cleaning the beans, pouring grape juice (no alcohol), the surface busyness reveals their lack of substance. They tend to be symbolic rather than representative. Our curiosity about the past and the wider present is necessary, since *All My Sons* purports to be about the transfer of values between generations. Chris Keller is the son who is meant to assure the future of the family when he marries Anne, who was previously engaged to his dead brother. We are told that Chris "makes people want to be better

than it's possible to be", but we never see him doing this. Chris has been estranged by his cowardice in relation to his father; but that self-censoring is not stressed in Miller's text, and it is ignored in this production. We are asked to forget Chris's own moral ambivalence when he delivers the play's moral punch line:

You can be better! Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you throw away your son because that's why he died.

To enforce this belief, Chris just happens to commit the suicide of his father ("Mother, I didn't mean to"); but Garrick Hagon's portrayal of an attractive, wholesome Chris does not emphasize Oedipal traits. It may be that Miller has posed an impossible choice for his interpreters: a self-contradictory Chris would compromise the social message of the play since he would become an unreliable mouthpiece; but a noble Chris blurs the father-son relationship and makes nonsense of the link between social and family values.

Like O'Neill, Williams, Albee and many other dramatists in the American tradition, Miller uses the mechanics of melodrama to show the family under stress from within and from without. *All My Sons* remains a fascinating and important play because its melodramatic dilemma raises central questions about the family on which the melodrama is based. Miller has got half of an essential equation: the bourgeois family is the motor force of capitalism. As long as the father can believe he does everything as a sacrifice for his family, his "crimes" are justified; as long as the son can suppress knowledge of his father's guilt, he will inherit his father's wealth and his mother's love, and some day he will be able to persuade his own son to exchange integrity for loving bondage. The other half of the equation is missing: every day life is political; the political ought to manifest itself in the psychopathology of the Kellers' daily life. Yet Miller doesn't show this. "Family" is sacred, if sick, concept in *All My Sons*. Miller couldn't, or wouldn't, loosen the ties could he, even though this failure made his social analysis profoundly sterile. Chris's "phony idealism" provides a satisfying tragic end to a traditionally structured three-act play. But in 1947 Chris Keller wasn't the voice of the future: Joe McCarthy was.

A study by Benjamin Robert Hoydon for the National Gallery portrait of Wordsworth on Mt. Helvellyn. The drawing is part of a collection of Fine English Drawings and Watercolours which will be sold at Christie's Great Rooms, 8 King Street, St James's, London SW1 on November 17.

## Bogged down South

By Richard Combs

Southern Comfort  
Various cinemas

"Louisiana, 1973" declares a title at the beginning of *Southern Comfort*, less to inform than to intimidate us. Not just an action story, it implies, this could just about scrape in as an allegory of the American war in Vietnam. The idea has possibilities, because the film belongs to one of Hollywood's most unworn but adaptable of genres, the lost-pastoral movie, in which a small military unit (usually deprived of its leader, radio and compass at an early stage) must fight its way out of foreign terrain through unseen but murderous "hostiles". It is an ideal form for dramatizing the politics of paranoia, and provided the basis of an excellent Western, *Uzama's Raid*, which actually appeared in Britain in 1973. But the curious thing about *Southern Comfort* is that although Vietnam persistently bangs in the air, the connection is never clinched, mainly because the film's intellectual ambitions are working in a different direction. This is not art-house but nouveau-action cinema, existential rather than

allegorical in approach. What it is looking for is not the meaning of Vietnam but the meaning of the genre itself.

The writer-director Walter Hill has lately made something of a name by carrying out similar operations in a variety of genres, such as cops and robbers (*The Driver*) and street gangs (*The Warriors*). Hill has suggested that *Southern Comfort* is a kind of Western, and one notices also that it is rather similar in plot to *The Warriors*, in which the eponymous gang, stranded in the Bronx, must fight their way across the "turf" of rival gangs to reach home base in Coney Island. This suggests that, apart from taking on each genre in turn (he has also made an actual Western, about the last days of the James and Younger gang, *The Long Riders*), Hill is also trying to amalgamate them in some essential form, a kind of *u-genre*. In *Southern Comfort*, a group of national guardsmen are despatched to patrolling a way through the Louisiana swamp, a routine exercise which the most ebullient of the group (Keith Carradine) promises to live up with some pre-arranged prostitutes once they reach the other side. But unruly elements in the squad gratuitously bait some Cajun hunters, the swamp's native inhabitants. The Cajuns strike back, and soon the patrol (leadless,

radioless and compassless) is on its mettle to complete the exercise alive.

What is most striking about the subsequent action is its physical immediacy - desperate men splashing through a decomposing wilderness - compared with the purely symbolic action Hill usually favours. This must largely be due to the actual rigours of filming in a swamp, which precludes the stylized use of locale evident in *The Warriors*. (Although there is something about the monotony of character endlessly wading through what looks like the same bit of swamp that imposes its own abstraction.) Given this realistic dimension, however, Hill has even more difficulty than usual in making the film work as a play of ideas. Apart from a vague opposition between the "city boy" Carradine and his redneck fellow soldiers, the portrait of the fractious squad is reduced to heated but unrevealing exchanges of invective. Similarly, Hill's treatment of the Cajuns never resolves an abstract notion of the enemy "out there" - meaning in our own minds - with a sense of them as a genuine community being violated by these fatigued warriors. Like its unlucky amateur soldiers, the film is effectively reduced to essentials, but from this new starting point proceeds merely to tramp noisily on the same

### New Oxford books: History

#### Lord Randolph Churchill

A Political Life

R.F. Foster

This biography of Lord Randolph Churchill, the first since Robert Rhodes James's in 1959, is written with stringencies as well as sympathy, and carries wider implications for the study of the period in general and for the biography of high politicians in particular. It draws an unforgettable portrait of a man determined throughout his short and glamorous life to behave like 'a character in a political novel'. Illustrated £16

#### The Greeks and their Heritages

Arnold J. Toynbee

This was Toynbee's last major work, completed shortly before his death in 1975. In it he explores the people whose history best exemplifies the way in which all civilizations respond to their own particular background. It will be read with enjoyment by all Toynbee's admirers, and by others who can here savour at first hand a new work full of his quirky brilliance and academic daring. £12.50

#### Revolutions and Revolutionaries

A.J.P. Taylor

This book explores the revolutionary tradition in Europe that began with the tail of the Bastille and ended, so far as Europe was concerned, with the establishment of Bolshevik rule in Russia. It is based on television lectures, here given a more literary form, and illustrated. £3.50 Oxford Paperbacks

#### Class, Ideology, and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution

Patrice Higonnet

The author argues that bourgeois and noble were sufficiently alike to come together in 1789, and might have done so in 1789 had it not been for the accidents of politics. For while the bourgeoisie was fundamentally intent on maintaining the domination of property over non-property, it was still responsive to the traditional claims of communitarianism. £22.50 28 November

#### Commitment to Empire

Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797-1800  
Edward Ingram

This is the second of Professor Ingram's books about Great Britain as a great power during the Industrial revolution, as shown in British interests in the near east between the Seven Years War and the Crimean War. This study of Britain's defeat in the war of the Second Coalition explains how the British were affected by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. £22.50

Oxford University Press



## commentary

## The natural and the sublime

By Juliet Wilson Bareau

El Greco to Goya  
National Gallery

Spanish painting is particularly in tune with the present return to striking forms of realism in art. Picasso's *Peasants* excited a remarkable response at the Hayward Gallery and the same is true of the seventy-four paintings, drawn from British and Irish collections, currently on display at the National Gallery.

There has been no pretence at offering a balanced survey of Spanish painting from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries: the slow development of British tastes in Spanish painting led, for example, to an abundance of works by Murillo, and to a scarcity of major paintings by El Greco and Goya, whose works did not begin to be generally appreciated until the early years of this century.

While our collections are remarkably rich in early Velasquez, his mature work is not well represented and even less so since the loss in 1970 of the portrait of Juan de Pareja (now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York). Thirteen paintings by or ascribed to Murillo and eleven by Velasquez are on display, but the balance is skewed against the seven by El Greco, five by Zurbarán, three by Ribera and only one or two by other painters such as Ribalta, Carreño, Maza, Valdés Leal, Meléndez and Paret. A number of paintings, for example those ascribed to Coello, Murillo and the circle of Velasquez, are included, as far as one can deduce from the catalogue, for their relevance in the context of British collecting rather than for their intrinsic merits. On the other hand, we are given the opportunity to appreciate two major works Velasquez's recently rediscovered and quite enchanting study of Prince Baltasar Carlos, called "The Riding School" and Zurbarán's "Surrender of Seville".

This handsome exhibition sets out to record and define the "secret sympathy" of the British for Spain and Spanish art, noted by Alexander Jardine in 1788. It was the elusive combination of the natural and the sublime which captured the admiration of British connoisseurs. Jardine wrote of Velasquez and Murillo that they were comparable with the best painters of the Italian school, "not only as faithful imitators of nature but sometimes soaring above her,

towards the true sublime, and particularly the former: the one seems to dignify, the other to beautify nature". Sixty years later, Stirling-Maxwell stated that Spain had produced "the painters whose works unite high excellence of conception and execution, with absolute adherence to nature, and are thus best fitted to please the most critical as well as the most uneducated eyes". These observations apply with special force to portraiture, a genre which was as important in English painting as in Spanish. The visitor entering the exhibition first sees, across the room, two splendidly formal yet lively portraits by Coello and the superb "Philip IV in brown and silver" by Velasquez, and is thus instantly exposed to some of the most striking features of Spanish art — a delight in ornamentation and formal design, a sense of profound philosophic detachment and a visual directness which brings the sitters to life in the most forceful way.

The fusion of spirituality and intense realism — indeed their direct interdependence — is perceptible from the very start of the exhibition in the works by Luis de Morales, where the powerful sense of form and the beautifully "functional" quality of the hands give weight to the spiritual intensity of the paintings. Hands, maneuvered but muscular, fervently expressive, play an important part in Greco's pictures and are orchestrated in the most astonishing way along the steel-blue, cutting edge of Christ's robe as he drives the traders from the temple. The directness of the Spanish vision and the lack of any academic orthodoxy led to a variety of approaches to an art of "pure painting" — Velasquez's work was and is still regarded, particularly by painters, as the true philosophy of art — and one of the pleasures of the exhibition is to observe the sharply differentiated styles of the various artists in their treatment of the same themes, to compare the treatment of hands, or of still-life — not just in the section devoted to the genre or in the *bodegones* of Velasquez but in the detail of other works: the ivy in El Greco's "Tears of St Peter", the bravura execution of the hat on the table in Velasquez's "Philip IV", the jugs held by Zurbarán's "St Rufina", the quill pens, silver and pearls on the desk in Goya's portrait of Saavedra.

The star of the magnificent group of early *hologones* by Velasquez, so crucial in the history of British collecting, is the "Water-seller" of

Seville, part of the defeated Joseph Bonaparte's loot brought to England by Wellington. The fascination which Velasquez's art has always held for painters is illuminated when we study the paintings in the light of Reynolds's remark that "what we all do with labour, he does with ease". Through their numerous, often radical *penitence*, we discover the artist's unceasing search for a perfect balance, an apparently instinctive effect of "ease" in his compositions, so evident from the early "Water-seller" to the mature *Rokeby Venus*.

The paintings of Zurbarán provide a remarkable contrast to the serious realism of Velasquez. The impressive "Surrender of Seville", which the catalogue reminds us was painted about the same time as Velasquez's "Surrender of Breda" (not in the exhibition), seems to take its cue from the world of Coello with its naive clarity of "mundan plan", the rhythms of legs and feet and the heraldic representation of the distant battle. But the grave intensity of the participants in the drama and the

superb handling of paint are only a step away from Velasquez. The famous "St Francis in meditation", a quintessential example of Zurbarán's work, hangs near a remarkable group of paintings of the Immaculate Conception by Velasquez, Zurbarán, Murillo and Antolinez.

Two restrained and sober portraits by Murillo (including the "Self-portrait" which influenced Hogarth's own) off set the sweetness of some of the religious paintings and the lively, slightly disquieting playfulness of the three paintings of peasant life. The large religious paintings suffer (as do other pictures in the exhibition) from the low level at which they are hung. The "Triumph of the Eucharist", in which the disposition of light and shade and the foreshortening of the figures are handled with great intelligence and sensitivity, loses much of its force when seen at eye-level. It manifests Goya's little-recognized debt to Murillo, whose work he must have studied on his visits to Seville in the 1770s (echoed both in the frescoes of

San Antonio de la Florida in Madrid and in the "Allegory of Poetry" in the National Museum, Stockholm, which includes figures almost identical with those of the distant spectators in the "Eucharist").

After the space accorded to Murillo, and the small but exquisite "cabinet" devoted to still-life painting, Goya is by represented twelve works, five of them very small, all squeezed into a sort of passage at the end of the exhibition, with the problem of hanging five disparate portraits in a row down one side — although nothing can diminish the lively intelligence of Andrés del Bernal and Meléndez Valdés, or the quiet radiance of Antonia Zárate. Of Goya's subject pictures, the most interesting are those which belong to the exception of the "Interior of a prison", from the Bowes Museum (although this moving, subtle painting, gleaming on its tin support, is scarcely visible behind a layer of dusty perspex and no real study or enjoyment of it is possible).

## The Grasmere and Wordsworth Museum

By Grevel Lindop

Wordsworth was not enthusiastic about museums. The ones he knew offered "a crowded neighbourhood of things that are by nature most unneighbourly", inducing chiefly "an aching and a barren sense / Of gay confusion", though, as he cautiously conceded, "to the memory something clings at last, / Whence profit may be drawn in times to come". Visitors to the new Grasmere and Wordsworth Museum, which opened on October 1, need not share his misgivings. The exhibition is "neighbourly" in the best sense: local in inspiration, friendly in atmosphere, and planned with great care for the environment.

It occupies a typical Lakeland "bank barn" of the 1860s, whose construction against a steep hillside has made it possible to carve out concealed space underground and the back to house the elaborate central heating and air-conditioning plant necessary for the well being of the costumes, paintings and manuscripts displayed upstairs.

The dual emphasis on poet and place is surprisingly effective. The opening display — dealing with the

geology and flora of Grasmere Vale, and its human settlement from prehistoric times to the "perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturists" discovered by an ebullient Wordsworth in 1799 — is far from the pedantic or perfunctory affair one might imagine. The stress is on how much there is to notice, and how admirably the Wordsworths noticed it: jewel-like photographs of local flowers, valleys and rock formations surround extracts from Dorothy's journals and a botanical textbook with her annotations (she finds the butterwort "very ill-described", the author failing to mention how "the leaves diverge from the stalk so as exactly to resemble a starfish"). The discovery of the Picturesque Lake District follows, with a rare Gainsborough landscape (the Langdale Pikes), a superb Francis Towne (Twydie Water "taken at the going off of a storm") and an eerie Joshua Cnissall, "Borrowdale with Classical Figures", the rugged woolly slopes and Lakeland sheep forming an unlikely background for two loiterers in sandals and white tunics.

A fascinating display shows how much the Romantic vision owed to developments in optics: Wordsworth's botanical microscope is here, a delicate brass contraption about the size of an egg-timer; there

are Claude glasses (the darkened convex mirrors used by painters and connoisseurs to "compose" the best views into still better landscapes), a small camera obscura, a camera lucida and a Victorian stereoscope offering a fine view of a rocky big descending a rutted road into an undulating three-dimensional Grasmere Vale. Shut away behind glass, some of these exhibits are less impressive than they might be. There is talk of moving the camera obscura (a wooden affair resembling a small shoebox) to an upstairs window where it could catch on its ground-glass screen the view of Helm Crag, perhaps something similar could be done with one of the Claude glasses, which at present reflect only their display case and the wall, giving no idea of the richly-textured, subtly harmonized and focused landscapes they were meant to encompass.

Upstairs we are in more conventional museum territory. There is a reconstruction of a Westmorland farm-kitchen in 1800, pleasant enough and fun for children, though paradoxically the wooden figures in their mob caps and aprons add an element of lifelessness to an otherwise lively scene, making it harder for us to imagine ourselves at home there. Another case exhibits, as if in reluctant concession to the merely curious, the usual odds and ends: the poet's shaving mug and sandal-wood box, his skates, his socks, his silk waistcoat, his hat, the inevitable locks of hair. But the real interest lies in a fine series of displays tracing Wordsworth's life in phases defined by place, from childhood at Cocker-mouth and Hawkshead via Cambridge, London, France and the West Country to Grasmere and Rydal. Manuscripts are counterpointed with pictures, maps and explanatory material in a way that admirably suggests the developing consciousness of a man uniquely responsive to his environment.

From a wealth of material, certain things cling tenaciously to the memory: a prim eighteenth-century view of Goslar beside a vast page from Dorothy's letter to Coleridge, every inch filled with an ecstatic praise of the poetry her brother had written, dating with such fertile intensity in account in the 1805 *Prelude* of the Bartholomew Fair in London ("a dream / Monstrous in colour, mood, shape, sight, sound") below a wonderfully nightmarish coloured print (after Rowlandson) of the fair, a full moon glaring through ragged clouds at garish boats, swineboats and a shadowy horde of revellers; the striking sharpness and subtlety of David Lyons's landscape photographs, used to illustrate key passages in the poems.

well . . . I have been reading for about the twentieth time your 'My Brother (sic) Evelyn'. Yours: what a masterly book . . . Yours: what a Plume.

It is a very happy show, with a bumper catalogue-cum-collection of essays edited by James H. Hume and Donald R. Bensen (1979). Pierpont Morgan Library/OLP 0 19 520357 7, which includes 109 pages of meticulous bibliography. Twenty-two of those pages list translations. You have probably read the English originals of *Archibald's nezavaznost* (Czech), *Gussie en karis* (Dutch), *Hulnapää Jili* (Finnish), *Die Fenerprobe mit sieben andern Geschichten aus dem Drunken-Club* (German), *Forduljón* (Finnish), *Perilous* (Hungarian), *Látna Pamlit* (Icelandic), *Neval Oo Indit* (Indonesian), *Jili, ragazza bizzarra* (Italian), *Mulmiser-shi gosshokai* (Japanese), *Welce-zobowigany* (Norwegian), *O código das Woosters* (Portuguese), *Jovenitos con botines* (Spanish), *Sommarpippi* (Swedish) and *Dolar yagmur* (Turkish).

books published, I am editing 'By The Way', Penrose's have two stories and two poems of mine. I have finished the 'Kid Brady' stories. I have a commission to do a weekly poem for 'Vanity Fair', and Pocock has just got permanently onto Penrose's staff, so in future he will be on the spot.

Sevanti-one years later, on January 4, 1975, Wordsworth wrote to his friend Alec Waugh, who had written congratulating him on his knight-hood.

Dear Alec, I think awfully for your letter. The thing came as a complete surprise to me. The Consul General in Washington rang me up and asked if I would accept a knighthood. I said — enthusiastically — 'Try to stop me. I was then told I mustn't tell anyone, not even my wife, so for a month I was nursing the secret, not quite sure if it was a solid offer, as the Prime Minister wrote to say that my name would be submitted to her gracious majesty, but with no guarantee that the Queen wouldn't say 'What, that stinker Wordsworth? No, Sir!'. However, all was

## P. G. Wodehouse

Sir, — It must, I think, be significant that no one who attacks P. G. Wodehouse over the German broadcasting affair ever fails to make at least one thumping factual error. Your correspondent J. W. Bruegel (Letters, October 30) says that to his knowledge Wodehouse "never even admitted to having made a mistake". I should have thought it impossible for anyone with the slightest interest in Wodehouse himself (as opposed to the fact of his having done a stupid thing) to have missed the comment he made in the first letter he wrote from Berlin to W. Townend, on May 11, 1942, published in *Performing Flea*: "Of course I ought to have had the sense to see that it was a lousy thing to do to use the German radio for even the most harmless stuff, but I didn't. I suppose prison life saps the intellect."

I suppose that Mr Bruegel's comment that "the contents" of the broadcasts "were entirely harmless and non-political" implies that he has read them: yet it seems ungenerous. The quite often quoted judgment of Air Marshal Boyd is at least something which an intelligent man could think: "Why the Germans ever let him say all this I cannot think. They have either got more sense of humour than I credited them with or it was just slipped past the censor. There is some stuff about being packed in cattle trucks and a thing about Loos jail that you would think would send a Hun crazy. Wodehouse has probably been shot by now."

Finally, is there any evidence, as Mr Bruegel suggests, that any listener was prompted to go on attending to Nazi propaganda transmissions because he once happened to switch on and hear P. G. Wodehouse broadcasting humorously about the discomforts he had suffered?

STEPHEN MEOCALF.  
School of European Studies, University of Sussex, Arts Building, Falmer, Brighton, Sussex BN1 9QN.

## 'Georgiana'

Sir, — I can assure Arthur Calder-Marshall (Letters, October 9) that *The Two Duchesses* has not been forgotten. On the contrary, his conclusions, drawn at a time when the Lamb papers to the British Library were not accessible, have been invaluable to students of the period.

With reference to events at Spa in the late summer of 1789, the letters of Lady Melbourne (whose biography I am writing) indicate that she was kept fully informed, and may even have encouraged some sort of collusion in the cooption of the Cavendish heir.

JILL ASHLEY MILLER.  
Reedham Old Hall, Norwich, Norfolk NR13 3TZ.

## 'Country'

Sir, — Trevor Griffiths's *Country* got off remarkably lightly from the critics. Kenneth O. Morgan (October 30). I heartily regretted having missed an episode of the "reactionary" *Brideshead* for the latest offering of the socialist enlightenment. In the context with proletarian realism Waugh was handsomely rewarded. Morgan comments on the excellent production and shooting. True, but this only accentuated *Country*'s dramatic weakness, shallow allegorization and contrived characterizations, which at times bad me laughing with disbelief.

The complaints that *Country* was not "historical", that it was not "social comment", that it was "innocent of Marxism" and "had nothing to say about class relationships" would be treated to the whole boorish gamut to which your reviewer found the play wanting. Symbolic workers occupy allegorical stables, whilst

## to the editor

## 'Paradigms Lost'

Sir, — What a strange argument against sentence-adverbial "hopefulness". Stuart Sutherland has come up with in his review of *Paradigms Lost* (October 23). He claims that to say "Hopefully, there will never be a nuclear war" somehow lulls us into inactivity: the adverb's vagueness "conceals the need to do something to bring about the desired end". But is that need expressed by any of the obvious alternative wordings? Certainly not by "It is to be hoped that Sutherland invokes, would surely inactivity on my part consonant with my saying, 'I hope . . . ' or 'We hope . . . ' is equally unlimited. Worse, Professor Sutherland would seem committed to accepting "Hopefully, tomorrow will be fine" as acceptable, since nothing can be done about the weather.

Might we hope that some day the opponents of the new "hopefully" will, giving up the doomed search for rationalizations, admit that they just don't like it?

J. O. THOMPSON.  
University of Liverpool, Centre for Communication Studies, Chatham Street, Liverpool L69 3BX.

Sir, — Stuart Sutherland, reviewing John Simon's *Paradigms Lost* (October 23), objects to Erika Jong's sentence: "Everyone lies about their feelings", where a plural possessive follows a singular pronoun. Yet later in his review he commits this supposed solecism himself, when he writes: "When someone seeks to tell others how to use words, the temptation to expose their own verbal sins is strong". I mention this, not to score points off Professor Sutherland, but because, despite himself, he illustrates a tendency that seems to me acceptable and reasonable. A black hole in English usage is our lack of a genderless singular pronoun, whether in the nominative form, "one" (corresponding to the French "on" (the real "on" is simply not appropriate in many contexts), or in the possessive, to use in agreement with "everyone", "anyone", "someone". "His or her" is impossibly clumsy, and even when the relevant gender is known the construction "Someone . . . his/her" sounds pedantic and unidiomatic. Very often the sex of the subject of the sentence may be unknown or variable, or we may not wish to identify it. Current spoken English resolves the difficulty by using the genderless plural "they" as singular forms in appropriate contexts. For instance, "If anyone wants more paper, will they raise their hand?" or "Someone phoned. 'Who was it?' 'They didn't say.'" I am sure that even prescriptive grammarians talk like this on occasion and that in time this useful mutation will become acceptable in written as well as spoken English: Professor Sutherland's inadvertent use of it shows the way things are going. There is a historical precedent in "you/yours", the second person plural form, which acquired a singular as well as a plural use after the decline of the old second person singular, "thou/thee/thy".

BERNARD BERGONZI.  
6 Eniscute Road, Warwick.

Sir, — May I correct a rather important slip in the pen in the details of *My Dearest Love: Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth, 1810*, printed about Claire Tomalin's generous review (October 30)? Though hardly needing the money to refurbish the Wordsworth Library at Grasmere, the Trustees of Dove Cottage do not propose to put up the price of "this beautiful and costly book" from £215 to £450 in 1982. The error has crept in because the book comes in two forms: 35 signed copies in full vellum at £450, and 265 unsigned in quarter-morocco at £215. Both prices — assuming that there are any of the vellum copies left by then — will have to go up in January, but merely to take account of inflation.

JONATHAN WORDSWORTH.  
Chairman, Trustees of Dove Cottage, St. Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ.

Sir, — Reviewing the Scholar Press's *My Dearest Love* (October 30), Claire Tomalin remarks that "a later volume, at a more ordinary price, will be annotated by Beth Darlington . . .". Readers may like to know that in fact we have in hand a book called *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth*, which contains not only the seven letters passing between the poet and his wife in 1810, reproduced by the Scholar Press, but also the twenty-seven letters exchanged in 1812 and hitherto unpublished. Annotated and introduced by Beth Darlington, and with illustrations, this book will appear in the spring at a "more ordinary price" of around £10.95.

D. J. ENRIGHT.  
Chatto & Windus Ltd, 40 William IV Street, London WC2N 4DF.

## Among this week's contributors

LOUIS ALLEN's books include *Sitting, 1974*, and *The End of the War in Asia*, 1976.

BRIAN BONO is Reader in War Studies at King's College, London. His most recent book is *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, 1980.

ROBIN BUSH is a lecturer in French at Woolwich College of Further Education.

HUMPHREY CARPENTER's biography of W. H. Auden was published earlier this year.

RICHARD COMBS is the editor of the British Film Institute's *Monthly Bulletin*. CAROLINE ELAM is a lecturer in the History of Art at Westfield College, London.

ROBERT FOLKENPLIN's *The English Hero 1660-1800* will be published later this year.

JOSEPH FRANK's books include *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt 1821-1849*, 1977.

WILLIAM HALEY was the editor of *The Times* from 1952 to 1966.

F. W. J. HEMMING'S biography, *Baudelaire the Damned*, will be published early next year.

MICHAEL HOWARD is Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford.

## Mozart's Dutch Patron

Sir, — Readers who are interested in Mozart, but who are not familiar with the *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum*, might like to know that a recent number (29 Jahrgang, Doppelheft 1/2, Salzburg, February 1981), contains an article by a Dutch colonial historian and musicologist, Frank Lequin, entitled "Mozart's . . . rarer Mann" (pp 3-19). In this he demonstrates conclusively that Mozart's mysterious Dutch patron, "De Jean", whose identification has baffled previous biographers, was Ferdinand Dejean (not De Jean), born at Bonn in 1731, died at Vienna in 1797. Dejean, an amateur flautist, was a German ship's surgeon in the service of the Dutch East India Company in Asia, 1758-67, who took a medical degree at Leiden after his return to Europe. He had made a fortune in the East Indies, and was a substantial stockholder in the Bank of England, like so many of his wealthy Dutch and German contemporaries. Frank Lequin's lengthy researches in the archives of several European countries have enabled him to document Dejean's interesting career in great detail, including the social, musical and financial aspects of his connection with Mozart.

C. R. BOXER.

## 'My Dearest Love'

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Sir, — I do not know where the daughter of Sir Lewis Morris died, but Raymond Smith's assertion (Letters, October 23) that death certificates "do not call for or give the parents' names let alone his or her occupation" is not quite accurate. On Scottish death certificates, the names of the deceased's parents are given (including the mother's maiden surname and, if married more than once, her other surname or names), the father's occupation, and whether the parents too are deceased. If the deceased was a married woman, her name is indexed under both her maiden and her married names (including names from any previous marriages). The genealogist of Scottish families has a head-start.

MARY HAMILTON  
113, Valley Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3PY

## Information on Death Certificates

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MARY HAMILTON  
113, Valley Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3PY

## 'Superdupert, Jeeves'

By Richard Usborne

P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration  
Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

The Wodehouse Centenary Exhibition occupies the whole of one long ground-floor room, and overflows cheerfully into cabinets in several other rooms, on that, and other floors. As you enter the hall, you see a big blow-up of the Low cartoon of the two-wars Wodehouse, and life-size cut-outs of James Montgomery Flagg's portrayal of Jeeves lead you into the Exhibition Room. There, straight ahead of you is a noble oil-painting of 'The Empress' with, in the cabinet below, a photograph of the Archbishop of Canterbury clasping a Black Berkshire piglet under his arm, in Iowa. He is himself a breeder of Black Berkshires, and the pig has written on its letter also in the cabinet, permitting the pig to be known, and expressing his grateful disapproval of all

artists who have limned the Empress in white or pink when Wodehouse at least twice in the texts wrote that she was a Black Berkshire.

There are many first editions, manuscript pages, old "Captain" volumes, letters, film posters, theatre programmes, Wodehouse lyrics in sheet music, dust-jackets, photographs, drawings of the infant Greville by his artist mother, and the originals of Rex Whistler's bust-portrait and dust-jacket design for *Londer and Funnier* and of Ronald Searle's ninety-year-old head done for Derek Grimsdick's once Wodehouse's publisher at Herbert Jenkins, is the account book, "Money Received for Literary Work", that young Wodehouse kept for the first five years of his writing life. A late autograph entry is:

On this, the 13th December 1904, time 12 pm, I set it down that I have Arrived. Letter from Cosmo Hamilton congratulating me on my work and promising commission to write lyrics for his next piece. I have a lyric in 'Sergeant Bruff' (another, probably, in 'The Gingham' a serial in the 'Captain', 5

books published, I am editing 'By The Way', Penrose's have two stories and two poems of mine. I have finished the 'Kid Brady' stories. I have a commission to do a weekly poem for 'Vanity Fair', and Pocock has just got permanently onto Penrose's staff, so in future he will be on the spot.

Sevanti-one years later, on January 4, 1975, Wordsworth wrote to his friend Alec Waugh, who had written congratulating him on his knight-hood.

Dear Alec, I think awfully for your letter. The thing came as a complete surprise to me. The Consul General in Washington rang me up and asked if I would accept a knighthood. I said — enthusiastically — 'Try to stop me. I was then told I mustn't tell anyone, not even my wife, so for a month I was nursing the secret, not quite sure if it was a solid offer, as the Prime Minister wrote to say that my name would be submitted to her gracious majesty, but with no guarantee that the Queen wouldn't say 'What, that stinker Wordsworth? No, Sir!'. However, all was

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It is a very happy show, with a bumper catalogue-cum-collection of essays edited by James H. Hume and Donald R. Bensen (1979). Pierpont Morgan Library/OLP 0 19 520357 7, which includes 109 pages of meticulous bibliography. Twenty-two of those pages list translations. You have probably read the English originals of *Archibald's nezavaznost* (Czech), *Gussie en karis* (Dutch), *Hulnapää Jili* (Finnish), *Die Fenerprobe mit sieben andern Geschichten aus dem Drunken-Club* (German), *Forduljón* (Finnish), *Perilous* (Hungarian), *Látna Pamlit* (Icelandic), *Neval Oo Indit* (Indonesian), *Jili, ragazza bizzarra* (Italian), *Mulmiser-shi gosshokai* (Japanese), *Welce-zobowigany* (Norwegian), *O código das Woosters* (Portuguese), *Jovenitos con botines* (Spanish), *Sommarpippi* (Swedish) and *Dolar yagmur* (Turkish).

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## The past's suffocating hold

By Peter Lewis

GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI:  
The Air We Breathe  
114pp. Brighton: Harvester Press.  
£6.95.  
0 7108 0056 8

Gabriel Josipovici's last novel, *The Air We Breathe*, succeeded in being ingenious and innovative without being ostentatiously "experimental". In this mind-teasing book, he made considerable demands on the reader, but his sophisticated use of suspense ensured that the narrative was gripping from first to last. His new novel, *The Air We Breathe*, is both more difficult and more demanding, but it lacks the compelling impetus provided by the element of mysterious inevitability and the structural devices of its predecessor. As a result, the reader who is prepared to put in the effort and concentration Josipovici's fiction requires may well feel a sense of diminishing returns as he works through the novel, piecing together the fragments of the dislocated narrative.

In *The Air We Breathe*, technique

comes perilously close to being an end in itself; the artistry of *The Echo Chamber* seems to have given way to artifice. There is an air of self-indulgent elaboration about the entire book, established by the long first paragraph, which opens and ends with "and" and contains no full-stop. Writers who fragment and intercut narrative can achieve great compression and intensity, communicating in a form of symbolic shorthand what would need far more space if related conventionally. Paul Bailey's *Trespasses* is a good example. In the case of *The Air We Breathe*, however, the opposite appears to be true. Told in a conventional way, the novel could easily have been much shorter than it is, since the content (no resurrect a forbidden term) is relatively unsubstantial.

To provide a straightforward synopsis of this content — a woman, Ginn, is in flight from her marriage to a Frenchman, Claude, whom she knew as a child during three summers spent in France, and so on — would be to give a totally false impression of the novel, since events both past and present are only gradually and often indirectly revealed; furthermore, much remains tentative, ambiguous, even unexplained.

Josipovici's use of "he" and "she" rather than the names of the characters (although very occasionally some of them are named) adds to this air of uncertainty, as does his avoidance of locating the action in time: towards the end of the novel, the inclusion of a specific date, found on the back of a photograph, comes as a shock. What interests Josipovici is not what you say but the way you say it.

The true flavour of *The Air We Breathe* is best conveyed by a fairly typical passage:

You don't understand, she wanted to say to him, you still don't understand and I thought you did we've talked so much, so much, remembering again her first glimpse of him in the street and the recognition and his face over lunch you can stay here I've got a spare room he had looked at her the messages he had left just directions at first how to use the coffee-pot the money for the milkman then little additions little notes left for her to find I hope you have a good day I hope I don't disturb you coming in sitting on her bed and her talking talking it was this need to talk but talk wasn't enough . . .

The virtually unpunctuated stream of language brings Molly Bloom's monologue to mind, but Josipovici's indebtedness to Joyce is tempered by his individual adaptation of the technique, so that it fluctuates between a first-person representation of consciousness and a third-person narrative. Subjectivity and objectivity tend to overlap and merge.

Although the chronology and action are not linear, *The Air We Breathe* is conceived as a seamless whole: there are no divisions into chapters or sections. But if the book unfolds in one continuous sweep, more like a long story or novella than a novel, the narrative itself is extremely involved and discontinuous. Time and place can change abruptly in mid-paragraph. Memories suddenly give way to unrelated conversations or events. Rapid transition and unexpected juxtaposition are essential to Josipovici's narrative method as he hints at certain key episodes and situations, then circles back to them, sometimes again and again, adding more information with each recurrence. As a result, what is initially obscure gradually becomes more intelligible: the death of Claude's grandfather by drowning in a river; Ginn's summer holidays in

France when a girl; her puzzling marriage to Claude.

Some things develop a symbolic significance which helps to integrate the novel: the box of stones Ginn runs away with, only to abandon casually; the hotel lift which paradoxically encages her but also takes her to freedom; the smoke-filled room which threatens to stifle her. The opening words of the book establish this idea of drowning or choking ("she gasped for air"), and the novel is very much about Ginn's quest for "air", her attempt to come to terms with her past in order to liberate herself from its suffocating hold.

As we have come to expect from Josipovici's novels, *The Air We Breathe* is a technical tour de force, but the virtuosity is here supported by a flimsy infrastructure which could be recast in novelistic terms. Josipovici's preoccupation with expanding the possibilities of the novel is leading him towards a formal and stylistic sophistication operating in a vacuum. Furthermore, *The Air We Breathe*, with its echoes of Joyce and Faulkner, illustrates how contemporary writing of the "advanced" and "experimental" sort often looks back more than it looks forward.

## Back from the Land of Missing

By Fleur Adcock

MAURICE GEE:  
Meg  
251pp. Faber. £5.95.  
0 571 11783 X

Maurice Gee's last novel, *Plumb*, was the story of a New Zealand Presbyterian minister who preached pacifism and socialism, left the church, and was sent to prison for sedition. The narrator of *Meg* is his daughter, a woman in her early fifties. In using her as a mouthpiece Gee has set himself an even trickier task than that of speaking through her obsessed and unfeeling father, but there are no lapses of style or tone; the narrative voice is consistently convincing.

Meg is the youngest of George Plumb's twelve children, and has grown up emotionally dominated by the family: her terrifying father, driven to extremity by his conscience, who rampaged through his later years shutting people out by selective use of his car-trumpet and quoting from the Bible after his conversion to rationalism; her mother Edie, a practical saint who "spoke of love and courage and honesty as though of things in her kitchen", and died exhausted after a lifetime of keeping the children quiet and, in hard times, feeding them on porridge while her husband ate solitary chops in his study; and the children themselves, the surviving inhabitants of the "Plumb Zoo". Early in the book Meg rejects her romantic, stylized view of them: "I'm grown up now. The Plumbs have a human shape. They're nothing special." But in her retrospective accounts of family gatherings, the central set-pieces of the novel, their humanity is what sets them apart from the less-than-saintly beings outside the family. "Edie's guests were glittering apes and birds. Only the Plumbs were human."

The period is the early 1960s, beginning when Meg goes to fetch her favourite brother, Robert, from his country retreat and install him in a cottage in the grounds of Pocono Haven, the Plumb family home near Auckland, where Meg and her husband now live. Robert has amblyopia, and the events of the book stem from the deaths of his dying. At the same time Meg's husband Fergus, a plumber, whom she married for love but has now partially withdrawn from, is others about whether or not to have an affair with

a woman thirty years his junior, while his brother-in-law Fred, in whose business empire Fergus has become involved, awaits arrest for fraud. An elderly neighbour floats about in her draperies passing on messages from George Plumb in the Great Beyond: " . . . weed the carrots. And, love makes the world go round. It's him all right", says Meg to Robert.

Meg's vice is sentimentality. She knows it, and accepts it as a sign of her emotional health, but battles to eliminate it from her literary style, mentally referring phrases to the judgment of her son Raymond, a kind of invisible authorial presence ("He is right again. It's a concrete path and I am not to spill my emotions over it.") She is haunted by a childhood dream of a black river on which the members of her family floated past her, one by one, dead. This, and her youthful concept of the Land of Missing (a grey place where people who are neither wounded nor killed, neither in hospital nor in heaven, wait eternally and alone) recur throughout the story. She sees her bald, ugly brother Robert, reduce and conscientious visitor, as a kind of saint (Plumbas tend to be saints or monastics, or occasionally both); she has long known that "he had no intelligence to speak of, and little imagination, but that he was good". His touch heals her emotional wounds after their homosexual brother Alfred has been beaten to death by "queer-bashers", as it healed their father's burnt hand in *Plumb*.

Other prominent members of the Plumb Zoo are Edie, Fred's gross and otiose ghostly wife, who totes a jar of cheap port everywhere she goes and is tormented by the conviction that she caused Alfred's death; Willis, a jolly philanthropist with a wooden leg; and the griggish Olyver, a retired judge whom Meg as a child ceremonially exiled to the Land of Missing as not a real Plumb. These and others appear and reappear at different stages of their lives as Meg dips in and out of the past in her attempt to get it straight and steady before her eyes. She herself is quieter and more moderate than many of her siblings — "Little Goody two-shoes" Edie calls her, with some justification, although Meg is capable of her father's intolerant hatreds as well as her mother's dislocated serenity. Her personality makes this a calmer, more subdued novel than its predecessor; its lack of colour, tension and humour, but the relegation of George Plumb's huge ego to an offstage role, reduces the

general scale of things, and Meg's generation hasn't quite the gritty pioneer quality of her father's.

The events of *Plumb* were enmeshed with New Zealand's political history: in *Meg* the focus is rather on its social concerns — the Depression, the domestic effects of the Second World War, attitudes to sex and money. Meg can well stand alone, but ideally both volumes should be read together; they complement each other, each subtly illuminating different aspects of characters and events, and the delicate ironies of the later novel are more clearly apparent when set against Plumb's eccentric view of matters in his own narrative. One hopes there will be a third book to complete the pattern.

Recently reissued in paperback by Angus and Robertson, Kylie Tennant's *Tell Morning* (This 446 pp. 0 207 14230 0), according to the publishers "the biggest, broadest and liveliest picture of Sydney ever painted in fiction", is a story of young girls who become prostitutes and of corruption among the rich. Other titles in the same series of paperback reprints of Australian fiction include: *The Adventures of Cuffy Mahony and Other Stories*, by Henry Handel Richardson; *The Boys in the Island*, by C. J. Koch; *Haxby's Circus*, by Katharine Susannah Pritchard; *Kylie Tennant's Ride on Strayer*, and *The Chaotic Bird*, by David Ireland.

## Still

Tugging my forlorn fathomling Xenophon grined Greek exams with grease and lost me marks, so I whisper when the barber asks Ow! or No, thank you! YES! Dad's voice bobbed me barks.

They made me use dad's hair-ol to look smart!

A parting scored the grease like some slash scar.

Such aspirations hair might have for ART, were lopped, and licked by dollpops from his jar.

And if the page I'm writing on has sneers they're not that sort to lose me marks for mass

being self-examination's grudging tears soaked into the blotter, Nothingness,

on seeing the first still I'd ever seen

of Rudolph Valentino, father, O

now, now I know why you used *Brilliantine*

to slick back your black hair so long ago.

Tony Harrison

By David Profumo

RICHARD B. WRIGHT:  
Final Things  
147pp. Robert Hale. £6.50.  
0 7091 9484 6

What would you do if your twelve-year-old son was raped and murdered, then discovered dumped in some garbage sacks, and you were tipped off about the identity of his killers? This submerged challenge runs through Richard B. Wright's fourth novel *Final Things*; and it is a story composed with such uncompromising precision that what might in other hands have remained a lurid detective saga is transformed into something altogether more disconcerting.

Charlie Farris is in his forties, living in Toronto, a lapsed novelist who now produces the occasional sports story for magazines. His second marriage has ended in divorce, and his split ex-wife, Pat, now lives with an accomplished young Englishman, allowing Farris weekly visits from their quiet son, Jonathan. It is on one of these occasions that Jonathan goes missing, and his murder drives the father back to the whiskey-bottle, reviving old jealousies to warda Pat and nostalgia about her family. Fired with a mixture of guilt and distress, he finds himself able to

act quite uncharacteristically when he is informed that his son's murderer is the leader of a predatory homosexual coterie with whom Jonathan had secretly been conducting narcotics transactions during the weekends away from his private school. This knowledge propels Farris into a world contaminated by hitherto inconceivable nastiness as he tracks down the killer, a ruthless left Sloan-type youth named Snapshot who specializes in the photographing of naked boys in the boarding-house run by his landlady-bedfellow Mrs Poole, who is also the mother of one of his cotamites.

Throughout the book, the focus is upon the inadequacies and pressures which underlie Farris as this personal disaster crushes his weary attempts to reorganize his life. His struggle against drunkenness is described with penetrating finesse, every little ritual and self-defusion that accompanies his relapse being documented in an admirably spare and unsentimental style. Determined to take the matter into his own hands, Farris is conscious that his attitudes have been transformed by the tragedy; what he does not realize, however, is that it has released within his personality a determination for revenge that also makes him excruciatingly vulnerable, thrusting him into a murky world where he is singularly ill-equipped to behave rationally. This vulnerability arrests the reader's attention more effectively than mere suspense, as we see that Farris himself is gradually becoming a kind of victim.

The motif of a formerly ineffectual man finding himself sliding into a world of terrifying activity invites comparison with works such as Patricia Highsmith's *The Blunderer*, a similarly brutal, unforgettable, yet curiously exhilarating novel. As is Highsmith's, Wright's purpose is to show an insulated domestic cosiness being invaded by a traumatic conflux of events, as the epigraph to *Final Things* makes clear: "Into many a green valley / Drifts the appalling snow", taken from Auden's ballad, "As I walked out one Evening". The undermining of security which that poem describes, the burrows of nightmare and the fragility of justice, are themes which the novel hauntingly develops.

This book is so compulsive that you have to put it down; at times you need to pause to admit how credible the plot really is. Wright's observations are so terse, and his dialogue so self-assured, that it is only when you stop reading that you begin to wonder what you might do if this happened to you, tomorrow.

## The road to revolution

By Joseph Frank

ANDRZEJ WALICKI:  
A History of Russian Thought  
From the Enlightenment to Marxism  
Translated by Hilda Andrew  
456pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford  
University Press. £15.  
0 19 82453 8

Anyone interested in the history of Russian culture has become aware that some of the best work in the field has been done, in the past fifteen years or so, by a Polish scholar named Andrzej Walicki. His first book, *Osobowosc i historia* (1969), a series of studies dealing with the Slavophiles, and Belinsky, Turgenev and Dostoevsky, has not been translated; but two later works, *The Slavophile Controversy* and *The Controversy over Capitalism*, have made him better known to a larger international audience. The present volume should receive, and certainly deserves, a wide public among students of Russian culture, and all those readers of Russian nineteenth-century literature who wish to obtain some enlightenment on the social-cultural background from which it emerged.

Indeed, while a knowledge of cultural history is of course indispensable for the study of any literature, it may be argued that this is more true of Russian than of any other major European literature of the same period. Owing to the difficulty of expressing controversial ideas directly in public print (though it is amazing how many such ideas did manage to find their way into the journals because of the obtuseness — but sometimes also the tolerance — of the Tsarist censorship), literature served more or less as a safety-valve through which forbidden subjects could be presented or at least suggested. Hence the notorious ideological density of the best Russian literature — a trait which still continues to distinguish its writers, whether novelists or poets, from their freer counterparts in the West, who sometimes enjoy the intensity of the Russian response to literature without fully understanding the reason for such fervour. It is, quite simply, that literature is not an adornment or accessory of everyday existence, but the only form in which Russians can see discussed the true problems by which they are preoccupied, and of which their rulers have always thought it preferable to keep them ignorant.

If Russian literature was created in such close connection with Russian thought, however, it was because this thought itself was so largely focused on the political and social-cultural concerns that occupied every thinking Russian; there was no inconspicuous involvement in creating characters who were consciously abstract, "philosophical" matters. It is primarily "thought" of this kind that Walicki places at the centre of his considerations (as his original Polish title indicated more clearly, *Russian Philosophy and Social Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*). And he argues, with a good deal of justice, that to write the history of Russian philosophy in any other way is "a particularly thankless task".

Professional philosophers in Russia, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were apt to be second- or third-rate Germans who conscientiously propounded one or another "system" acquired in their youth, or Orthodox theologians teaching in seminaries and turning their backs on the controversies racking the current scene. (There were, of course, some exceptions, and Walicki makes brief mention of Pampilius Yorkevich, whose polemic against Chernyshevsky's materialism deserved a little more extended treatment if only because it is so right in maintaining that a parade of such figures, and a review of their works, would only reveal the appalling poverty of official Russian intellectual life. It is only when one turns from the schools and seminars to the independent journals, and to the writings of those who would in the West be loosely called social-cultural

essayists and publicists, that the genuine interest of Russian thought begins to appear. This is why, as Walicki contends, it is preferable to study it primarily as the history of social thought, and to set it, as he does, firmly in the context of social-political history.

Seen from this point of view, in terms of the issues that were closest to the hearts of the educated Russians of their time, the history of Russian thought takes on quite a new richness and importance, despite the lack of any truly outstanding philosopher of major stature. (The one possible exception being Vladimir Soloviev at the end of the nineteenth century, though Alexander Herzen is also entitled to press a claim). For we find in Russian thought, as Walicki sees it, "a most unusual cross-fertilization of ideas and influences; the rapid modernization of a great nation compressed into a short space of time; the curious co-existence of archaic and modern elements in the social structure and in ways of thinking; the rapid influx of outside influences and resistance to them; the impact on the intellectual elite of the social and ideas of Western Europe on the one hand, and their constant rediscovery of their own native tradition and social realities on the other." This passage, from the preface to the Polish edition of the book, defines the larger horizon within which Russian thinkers debated the issues of their time. And one can agree with Walicki that "all these factors help to make the history of Russian ideas . . . more interesting and more dramatic than the intellectual history of many more advanced countries with richer philosophical traditions". It may be added that these factors also give Russian thought a special international relevance at the present time, when so many Third World peasant countries, entering the phase of modernization, are faced with exactly the same problems of assimilating alien ideas and asserting their own cultural identity.

Walicki is of course a Marxist, and an eminent member of the Polish Academy of Sciences; but the Marxism of Eastern Europe, or at least of Poland, is by no means that of the Soviet Union. It is significant that in his introduction to *The Slavophile Controversy*, he acknowledges his debts to such thinkers as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber and Karl Mannheim (or to such freebooting Marxists as Lucien Goldmann) rather than making the usual obeisances to more orthodox authorities. To be sure, Marx, Engels and Lenin are amply cited in his pages; but he always uses them appositely and for their genuine insights, never as sacred writ to close a question,

Moreover, Walicki is careful to exclude any kind of "reductionism" in his approach, and even has the audacity (in the present volume) to criticize Lenin for such a failing with reference to a remark about the Populist theoretician N. K. Mikhailovsky.

Such a criticism stems from Walicki's acute awareness, expressed in the earlier volume, of the dangers of assuming "that an individual's ideas are directly dependent on the sum total of his social involvements which are often quite fortuitous"; and he explains that he prefers rather to seek for "a correlation between structures of thought and social structures — and the types of human relationships determined by them — on the other". His own position is said to result "indirectly" from "the basic thesis of historical materialism", but Walicki chooses to name it "anthropocentric" — by which he means that "at the core of every view of the world lives a specific philosophy of man and society."

Again, however, he hastens to add that "this does not mean that man's imaginative curiosity is confined to the historical and social issues; it is only one of the consequences of the elementary truth that men belong to the world of human kind and in their reasoning reflect one or another of the laws governing this world." With such an "elementary truth" even non-Marxists can readily agree; and it is this freedom from dogmatic blinkers, combined with an ingenious ability to find fresh and illuminating "correlations", that gives special value to Walicki's contributions to the history of Russian culture.

The present volume is written as a survey, and its task is primarily to convey information rather than to argue any particular thesis. The book is thus difficult to review in the sense that, covering as it does so wide a range of issues — and issues that in most cases have been hotly disputed now for more than a century — to deal adequately with all the questions it raises would require an extended commentary or every chapter. However, Walicki's point of view has already been indicated in the quotation from his preface; it is clear that he sees the interest, and indeed what might be called the pathos, of Russian thought, in the effort to cope with "the social realities and ideas of Western Europe on the one hand, and [its] constant rediscovery of [its] own native tradition and social realities on the other." Even though Walicki subordinates the task of interpretation to that of exposition, and his history includes much that cannot be directly included within the terms of his analysis, a rapid scrutiny of the book from this point of view will not dis-

port his basic approach and allows the reviewer to do more than write a series of random notes on individual topics.

There is not much evidence of any reaction against European influence in the first two chapters, which deal primarily with the reign of Catherine the Great. Catherine herself was enamoured with Enlightenment thought, and made efforts to encourage it until it became a threat to political stability. The two main figures of this period, N. I. Novikov and Alexander Radishchev, both in awe of her and landed in Siberia, Novikov was a satirical journalist and, later, an important force as a publisher; Radishchev's *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* contained an impassioned attack on serfdom. Walicki also believes that the late treatise on the immortality of the soul (written in Siberia) is "the highest achievement of Russian Enlightenment thought in the sphere of pure philosophical speculation". In addition, he discusses a few minor figures (recently disintegrated by Soviet scholarship) who earnestly carried on in the Enlightenment tradition.

Some reaction against Enlightenment values can be observed in the second part of Catherine's reign, after the peasant revolt of Pugachev had temporarily shaken the foundations of the Empire. Mostly, though, this took the form of Freemasonry, to which Walicki devotes a useful section. The influence of this movement, familiar to all readers of *War and Peace*, is explained as a reaction against the fright engendered by Pugachev among the enlightened aristocracy. This produced "an inducement to abandon liberal ideas", but it was impossible for such persons simply to return to the previous master-of-inet acceptance of the exploitation of the peasantry. . . . What remained was the flight into the realm of individual self-perfection, the "inner life" of the soul, or, in other words, the Masonic lodge." Even the aristocratic opposition to Catherine, who saw themselves as representing the old Boyar tradition, did not appeal to Russian antiquity and simply wanted a Western constitutional monarchy.

The single exception is Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov, whose *A Discourse on the Corruption of Morals in Russia* (unpublished during his lifetime) deplored the moral disintegration that had resulted from Peter's reforms. Herzen published the text many years later as anticipating the Slavophiles; but Walicki finds too many Enlightenment ideas in Shcherbatov to accept the analogy without serious objections, and calls it "largely superficial and even unreliable".

The Decembrists, however, attached no real importance to the *obshchina* and had their eyes firmly fixed, as a model, on European social and political developments. Indeed, they are depicted by Walicki as the only — and very short-lived — group manifestation of classical liberalism on the Russian social scene, even though they have been claimed as predecessors by generations of Russian revolutionaries inspired by Socialist and Communist ideas (Lenin called them "the best sons of the gentry"). "The Decembrist Ideology," Walicki comments, "found no continuators in later Russian revolutionary thought. No radical movement in Russia was to put forward a liberal or even a liberal-cum-aristocratic conception of freedom or to support economic liberalism." The absence of one of the sharpest differences between Russian and Western European social-political development.

With the failure of the Decembrist revolt, the gentry intelligentsia sought consolation from the military-bureaucratic rigours of the régime of Nicholas I in German Idealism and Romantic literature. Anti-Enlightenment ideas were now the order of the day, and the secret "Society of Wisdom-Lovers" (they chose the Masonic term *philosophy*) initiated the vogue of

## Elixir

Turning a stone house into seven figures.  
Transported him to money's clean cold alp  
To bang-glide on a market's thermal rigours  
Learning new ways to corner, bodge or scalp.

Turning a copper nail that tightly gripped  
A green slate on his roof to daily bread  
Made him afraid to eat when stealing dipped  
And meat cost more than door-locks or sheet lead.

Turning a life's work into stocks and shares  
Converted him to shirk the tears and shocks  
Of love, rid of laborious household cares  
And freed him to buy sex on piers and docks.

Turning old granite walls to bars of gold  
Amassed his fears of sudden falls in one  
Commodity. When all his wealth was told  
It filled a vault with bone-dry speculation.

Turning his home into a foreign room  
Replete with art to beat inflation chilled  
His heart to zero. In that lee-bound tomb  
He housed immortal seed unawed, untitled.

Richard Murphy







# The Dean's family tree

By Humphrey Carpenter

ANNE CLARK:  
The Real Alice  
Lewis Carroll's Dream Child  
271pp. Michael Joseph. £12.50.  
0 7181 2064 7

There is actually quite a lot of work still to be done on Lewis Carroll. Where did his particular brand of nonsense come from? Does it have any historical relationship to nonsensical eighteenth-century chapbooks such as *Sir Gannier Van* - "Last Sunday morning at six o'clock in the evening as I was sailing over the tops of the mountains in my little boat... I could J. J. Grindville's *Un Autre Monde* (1844), with its pictures of hunting playing-cards and a weeping gullie, have been seen by Carroll, or at least by Tenniel? And even without turning to outside influences there are questions to be answered: how much, for instance, did Carroll see himself as an adult humours who just happened to have written a couple of books for chil-

dream? His early work, after all, was comic verse and prose in the *Punch* vein, while nothing that followed *Through the Looking-Glass* was directed specifically or entirely at children.

All this, however, remains neglected, the nearest thing to a serious critical study apparently being Francis Huxley's *The Raven and the Writing Desk* (1976), a brilliant but itself deliberately nonsensical study of Carrollian nonsense. Meanwhile the biographies pour out in endless streams. Since the official life by S. D. Collingwood, Carroll's nephew, in 1898, there have been, to name but a few biographers, Langford Reed (1932), who was the originator of the C. L. Dodgson-mist-Lewis-Carroll were two different people view, Florence Flecker Lennan (1945), Derek Hinton (1954), and Anne Clark (1979). Miss Clark's book is not only the most readily available at the moment, but also one of the best, hinging in a great deal on evidence not known to earlier biographers, and being particularly enlightening on the relationship between Carroll, Dodgson and Alice Liddell, the Christ Church Deanery ten-year-old for whom the first of his two great children's stories was written. One

turns, therefore, with some excitement to Miss Clark's new life of Alice Liddell herself, in the hope that she has found out yet more about this undeniably intriguing, if by now rather over-exposed, quasi-love-affair.

Paedophilia is certainly not the name that Miss Clark would give to it. In her 1979 biography of Carroll she does, however, cite two facts that would seem to support those who believe that he was really "in love" with Alice - that is, was consciously attracted to her in a romantic fashion, and perhaps even hoped to marry her one day. The first is that a page has been torn out of his diary at the end of June 1863, just when some sort of major, and largely permanent, breach occurred between him and the Liddell family. This was when Alice was eleven, and *Wonderland* had been mostly written but was not yet published. The second is that Dodgson's brother Wilfred fell in love, during 1865, with the fourteen-year-old daughter of the Professor of Astronomy at Oxford; she too was called Alice, and he eventually married her. Initial objections to the union were not so much on account of her age as because he had no money.

Expectations that *The Real Alice* will produce further minor revelations of this sort are not satisfied. The first part of the book is largely a reworking of Miss Clark's Carroll biography, with the addition of a great deal of material about the Liddell family's origins and fortunes. (Henry George Liddell, the Dean, lexicographer and one-time headmaster of Westminster, was a Thomas Arnold-like figure who deserves a new biography far more than does his daughter.) Miss Clark produces a family tree which would surely have delighted Dodgson, showing as it does that Alice Liddell was almost a real "Queen Alice", being related through an amazing tangle of cousinships to the present royal family. But about the relationship between Alice and Dodgson, the book has, if anything, less to say than does Miss Clark's earlier volume. Alice is described variously as having a "wistful piquancy" and (later) "erf piquancy"; we are told that her first encounter with Dodgson was "a meeting as important in literary terms as that of Dante with his Beatrice", and so on; but when a few new facts turn up - Alice's own feelings about the breach with Dodgson, for example - sources are not always given.

The second part of the book is more entertaining, though perhaps for the wrong reasons. We are allowed some rather chilling glimpses into Alice's later life as Mrs Reginald Hargreaves. After nearly becoming betrothed to Prince Leopold, she found herself the wife of an English country gentleman ("Reg"), of gradually dwindling means. Two of her sons were killed in the trenches of the Western Front, and she ended her days as a lonely and bitter widow, tyrannizing the housemaids and butler, whose photographs (rather charmingly) are included by Miss Clark. Alice could paint and draw quite well (Ruskin, who taught her, may have been in love with her), but nothing she wrote or said about Dodgson gives the slightest hint that she had any originality of mind; if we did not have his photograph of her, we would wonder why he loved her. As it is, they say more than anything a biographer can express.

Understandably, she got little fun out of being the "real" Alice; the first time the book seems to have done her any good was when, needing the money, she sold the original manuscript of *Sotheby's* for £15,400 in 1928. Probably Beatrice would have done the same.

# A wonderland of books

By Francis Huxley

EDWARD GIULIANO:  
Levia Carroll  
An Annotated International Bibliography 1960-77  
253pp. Brighton: Harvester Press. £25.  
0 7108 0008 1

This bibliography of all works by or on Carroll published between 1960 and 1977 is a curious gem that will not only be of signal value to Carrollians, professional or amateur, but will afford (though it does cost £25) fair amusement to botanizers of human nature. It consists of about 1,250 titles of books and articles, of which 549 - in forty-six different languages (if I have counted correctly) - are new editions of Carroll/Dodgson works. There are nearly 90 bibliographic pieces, over 470 works of biography and criticism, and a miscellaneous 125 or so; together with lists of the reviews accorded the lucky ones. To each of the items Edward Giuliano has given a small description of his own, or has quoted some key phrase from the piece in question, sometimes briefly and sometimes (the volume he edited being an example) at length.

These notes are welcome. How else would one learn, in such tantalizing summaries, that the *Alices* are written in code and that *Looking-glass* is all about Judaism? That *The Walrus and the Carpenter* reveals strong archetypal elements with Freudian implications, and has affinities to Eliot's *The Waste Land*? That Bismarck could well have been the model for the Walrus. (Cavour for the Carpenter, and Austria for the oysters? That if, with Carroll in mind, you read *Don Quixote* - or *Steppenwolf*, Kafka, Artaud, Proust's *Compliment* or *Lolita* - numerous curious resemblances immediately suggest themselves?)

Carroll's nonsensically abusive precision has attracted such attention from the start, and it is true to say with one of our more popular Carrollians, here noted that Alice is no longer a children's book. It can be difficult to imagine it as being briefer. Some works included here find the *Alices* full of fear and embarrassment, as giving out a peculiarly menacing quality and being pervasively horrifying. One commentator, an accomplished storyteller, found the undirected force of Carroll's fantasy distressing as a child; three others, hand together to find him "bored and so included in *Play*... *Wonderland*... *Alice's Adventures*...

Could Do Without. High time, therefore, for *Jabberwocky* to be assigned to high-school students as an exercise, and for *Wonderland* to be the prototype of *Look Back in Anger*.

Carroll is further brought into discussions about Joyce, the Surrealists, Hesse, Quevedo, Hopkins, Gogol, Darwin and Pinter; while as master of words, logic and nonsense he is scolded with Popper and Broad, complimented with Wittgenstein and flattered with Berkeley, Hobbes, Kant, and Empedocles (whose space-time vision, I learn, may have entered our literature via Humpty Dumpty rather than Matthew Arnold). His semantics and semiotics are duly celebrated, as is his ability to use fallacies, mirror-imagery (his formulations here being of equal moment to the invention of zero) and his own brand of Relativity.

A more delicate subject is broached with inquiries into his stutter, his medical history, his sexuality, his overt going-on about food and

covert anality. Some of these appear misguided to the humane psychoanalyst, who would like the distinction between Carroll, his works and his reader to be kept more clearly in mind, while several lay Carrollians obviously wish that Freud had never been born. Jung is here to give Alice Carroll's anima, the rabbit hole is made much of, and Alice's twelve changes of size, carefully noted by one author, are described by another as typically infantile experiences. Some, taken up by the psychedelic revolution, would prefer to describe them as the result of an acid trip; while the *Adventures* as a whole can be thought of as a comic compendium of feminist issues.

Or are they, as one classic study insists, a piece of entertaining stentily performed in a closed field? For, as yet others remark, Nonsense shifts the notional, has a repressive logic at once tyrannous and anarchic, and uses words to destroy

myth. Plainly, we should here appeal to Carroll's theory of negation, but this is flawed, while his nonsense can be called a logical insanity or waking dream, being often concerned with trials and self-consciousness; and it communicates to the reader through not content, but construction.

Many Carrollians accordingly look at the construction of their subject's life, and inquire into the lodgings he frequented when in London to see the theatre, whether he visited the Liddells via Llandudno and by train, and just what the weather was that golden afternoon when *Wonderland* first sprouted. Some use the greatest expertise on textual variations - and variations of bindings - and restore the time when he experimented with an electric pen, or used violet ink rather than black. Plainly, their motto is the Gryphon's advice to Alice: "Adventures first: explanations take such a dreadful time", with the unspoken comment

that explanations of the wrong sort are dreadful in themselves.

Decoding, however, is another matter, since Carroll delighted in codes. Just what codes he used is another matter. Can he, consciously or unconsciously, have called his characters from the Tarot pack? (I prefer not to believe that Mark Twain was the real author of *Wonderland*.) Such questions can hardly be answered before one has discovered the rules of nonsense - preferably by using nonsense according to the rules it discovers, rather than those of psychoanalysis, semiotics, chess, geometry or whatever. Such an apparently tautologous exercise has been attempted, and I am sorry to say that the work in question, though properly listed, has been given no descriptive note by the editor. I feel the more curiously about this omission since I am the author concerned: a fact the reader should take note of, lest my review mislead him.

# Un-realities

By C. R. Pike

ROSEMARY JACKSON:  
Fantasy  
The Literature of Subversion  
211pp. Methuen. £6.50 (paperback). £2.95.  
0 4167710 7

Despite the title of her book, Rosemary Jackson is much more interested in Reality than in Fantasy. Consequently, fantasies in Theodore Ziolkowski's sense of imagined other worlds (Charles Kingsley, C. S. Lewis, Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin, etc) are early and severely dealt with, and hardly appear again in this study. Dr Jackson explains that her intention to such works has come about "not simply through prejudice against their particular kinds", but "because they belong to that realm of fantasy which is more properly defined as fairy, or romance literature". This transitive literature of transcendentalism or "romantasy" with its nostalgic ideals of harmony and wholeness, is in Jackson's view less significant than the relative literature of the fantastic (Mary Shelley, Poe, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Kafka and Pynchon), a literature not of invention but of, or, (re)invention, which distorts the contours of reality. Given that this is her subject-

matter, Dr Jackson has written a wide-ranging and frequently stimulating Introduction to the subject of "fantasy" in modern literature. Her preliminary theoretical section combines a literary assessment of the fantastic as a mode, based on Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A structural approach to a literary genre* (1973), with a primarily Freudian psychoanalysis of the genre. In the second section, the concepts and techniques of a large number of fantastic texts are discussed, from Gothic works through "fantastic realism" and Victorian fantasies to modern works by Kafka and Calvino, Pynchon and Pynchon.

Discussing the fantastic is not, of course, without its problems. A literature which, as Jackson says, "is preoccupied with limits, with limiting categories, and with their projected dissolution", is itself limitless in variety. In this book alone the modern fantastic is discovered to be "a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss"; that [literature] in which the question of the unconscious emerges; a literature which recognizes and foregrounds the uncanny; which manifests 'uncertainty' as to the nature of the 'real'; a problematization of categories of 'realism' and 'truth'; of the 'seen' and 'known'; which acts to fracture traditional concepts of the psychic unity of the self and 'a discourse telling of absolute otherness' (this last definition

of Sartre). Faced with all this, and with the seemingly infinite catalogue of fantastic themes, one begins to wonder whether there is or ever was any such thing as realism. Jackson is therefore very wise to direct her attention towards a structural, rather than thematic analysis of the fantastic.

A striking feature of this book, which seems itself to embody some of the disruption practised by the fantastic, is the hyphenation of certain key terms to reveal a typically fantastic ambiguity within them. Literary fantasies "re-cover" desire, the Tolkienesque fantasy avoids existential "dis-ense", fantasy "re-places" and "re-presents" the world, makes it "ex-centric". Although this splitting can be unnecessary (we learn nothing new from "re-said" and "un-real") or even tiresome (does "re-present" have to be so put throughout the book, can't the author rely on our recognition of it?), this tagging of fantastic functions nevertheless provides some useful bearings for a journey through the theory and literature of fantasy.

A disappointing aspect of the book, however, is its neglect of the twentieth-century fantastic, the treatment of whose texts occupies only fifteen pages. What about Nabokov's fantasitization of language? What about pornography, a literature which, despite its underlying social conventionality, is arguably fantastic in its exposure of crisis in the stability of

the self? And what about that pre-eminent twentieth-century form, science-fiction? Jackson dismisses the psychology of Le Guin and others, but SF could have been a testing-ground of the relationship between fantasy and the fantastic, a relation which is, after all, principally one of proportion. In fantastic literature, Fantasy becomes the property of Reality, and the fantastic an identifying feature of realism, whereas in fantasy literature Reality is the condition of Fantasy, and realism the necessary attribute of fantasy.

Jackson has set out to enlarge Todorov's definition of the fantastic not only with a psychic dimension, but also with an ideological one. She does demonstrate convincingly both the reaction of the fantastic vision against the forms of bourgeois society and art, and the ideological inhibitions operating within and against the fantastic in this context. There is, however, no reference to the popularity of fantasy in societies where art is a one-party system: the system of socialist realism. Here, as is evident in the work of Russian authors such as Bulgakov, Sinavsky and the Strugatskys, fantasy - the "literature of subversion" in Jackson's subtitle - has indeed produced sub-versions of reality, underground manifestos of circumvention and contravention which attempt to represent the reality that has been forsaken by realism.

# Conspicuous construction

By Caroline Elam

RICHARD A. GOLDTHWAITE:  
The Building of Renaissance Florence  
An Economic and Social History  
459pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £16.50.  
0 8018 2342 0

"Men at that time were crazy for building", reported Luca Landucci of the years around 1480 in Florence. The diarist's wonder at the extravagance of his fellow citizens has been echoed by modern historians, puzzled by this passion for building at a time of apparent decline in the Florentine economy. As another diarist put it, "It's very beautiful, but it's the ruin of the citizens."

Richard Goldthwaite's important new book stands this problem on its head by setting out to show that analysis of the booming building industry can confirm a revisionist view of Florentine prosperity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: a view which is increasingly held by students of the crucial textile industries. Although there was no real growth, in the sense of technological change and increased industrial output, none the less the "conspicuous consumption" involved in building stimulated the craft industries, generated new demand, and helped to produce a more "mature" economy. By looking at the "flourishing of the arts" in Florence in terms of the laws of supply and demand, Professor Goldthwaite not only revivifies economic history but also attempts nothing less than an economic explanation of the Florentine Renaissance. Thus *The Building of Renaissance Florence* is of extraordinary interest on a number of levels.

The core of the book lies in the 280-odd pages devoted to the construction industry. This is a superbly documented account of the financing and organization of building, the supply and working of materials, the role (shown to be minor) of the guild, the wage levels and working conditions of artisans, and the training, status, and working practices of the architect.

While lovers of Florence will find a passionate commitment to the past achievements and enduring physical fabric of the city, those who groan at yet another Florence-oriented view of the Renaissance will be agreeably surprised to find Florentine building set - partly for want of comparative material - nearer at hand - against the much better-studied construction industries of northern Europe.

Professor Goldthwaite shows that the Florentine building boom did not result in the development of large-scale contracting firms such as were to appear in European capital cities in the seventeenth century. In Florence the patron could not hand over responsibility for payment of workers and record keeping to the task-rate contractors or on a direct labour system. Even where agreement was for a flat fee, the builders did not have enough capital to sustain the whole operation from quarry to building site, and periodic advances from the patron were common. Such a system was well suited to the methodical book-keeping habits of the Florentine merchant of building, a committee, who often appointed a special purveyor (procuratore) to keep charge of the payroll and check supply of materials. It was the *capomastro* (rather unsatisfactorily translated as "foreman" here) who kept the employment record. With this division of responsibility in mind, even Michelangelo's working habits become clearer. Although later to disavow himself from the Florentine workshop tradition, he was explicitly designated "capomastro" of the architecture of the New Sacristy, where he kept detailed records, many of which still survive, of the masons' day labour. It was not only Michelangelo's *terribilità*, but also his desire to take over more of the building administration than was customary, that led the purveyor to describe him as "a man with whom I would not have had patience for a single day."

It would be interesting to know how far the organizational picture changed in the later sixteenth century, after the greater degree of bureaucracy introduced by Duke Cosimo. For although the chronological scope of this book ostensibly extends to 1600, Goldthwaite's interest dwindles after the fall of the last Republic in 1530. The routine use of commandeered labour by the Grand Dukes, hardly mentioned here, clearly marked a departure from the "normal procedures of the market place", even if it did alter the basic structure of the industry. Similarly, the increasing tendency of architects to take on flat fee building contracts, which became common in sixteenth-century Rome, must interest the architectural historian even if its economic significance is marginal.

Of the materials used in Florentine buildings, stone and marble have been relatively well studied before. Bricks, the hidden matrix of most Florentine buildings, have by contrast been virtually ignored in the past, and Professor Goldthwaite's account is of particular value as the first discussion of post-Roman brick-making in Italy. He shows that the brick industry in Florence was relatively highly developed, and that the Florentines were early users of permanently installed kilns capable of large output. At the same time he raises the interesting question why bricks were so rarely used as facing material in Florence. In Rome, where antique buildings were used as a quarry and travertine was locally available, fine brickwork was nevertheless common on facades, and all *antica* methods of bricklaying were revived in the sixteenth century. The one place in Florence which uses this material, Ammannati's Palazzo Grifoni, sticks out like a sore thumb against the Brunelleschian grey and white of Piazza SS Annunziata. One of the few sources not cited by Professor Goldthwaite, the carnival song of the *muratori* by Jacopo da Benincasa, suggests a local bias against working in brick:

Building with bricks  
Is coarse work, weak and deceptive  
Because the bricks are not all good  
And those who understand the art dislike it.  
Not everyone can do this kind of building  
Which very often goes to ruin.

Refined techniques of making and laying bricks were developed in the cathedral workshop in order to build the ingenious herring-bone courses of Brunelleschi's dome. The *Opera*

del Duomo is, however, consciously omitted in Professor Goldthwaite's account of the organization of building, on the grounds that its activities are relatively well known and its organization "atypical", because of its financial, but as a centre of architectural and constructional expertise, and as an office of public works whose domain extended far beyond the cathedral walls, the cathedral workshop deserves a place in any account of building practice. The very presence, for instance, of such a regular and paternalistic employer might modify the author's view of the instability of working conditions. For Professor Goldthwaite, the craftsman, like the patron, was "on his own", drifting from one building site to another, neither fettered nor protected by his poverty-stricken and ineffectual guild. This may be less true of the cathedral workshop than it was of private enterprises, where, for instance, we are told that Filippo Strozzi cut the wages of the artisans working on his palace during the years of political upheaval and high food costs between 1494 and 1498.

The characterization of the cathedral workshop as atypical is part of a wider view of the Renaissance as an essentially private secular world. This neo-Burckhardtian emphasis is obvious in the chronological survey of building that opens the book and in the succeeding section on patronage as "demand". "What makes Florence unique, and accounts for its importance in the history of European architecture, is that there for the first time the urban upper classes began to build conspicuously", Goldthwaite claims, seeing the private palace as the archetypal Florentine Renaissance building. The "conspicuous" aspect of these palaces is their architectural pretension and sheer size: they are remarkable not so much for the number nor for the dimensions of individual rooms. Magnificence, a desire for fame for oneself and one's family, as well as emulation of antiquity, are cited as motives for palace building by Professor Goldthwaite, who does not believe that these huge structures filled new functional needs, but sees them rather as a manifestation of the need to fill them with precious belongings, so that "this inflated private world may have generated pressures on men to sustain their increasing social isolation by surrounding themselves with more objects".

Although Goldthwaite is reluctant to trespass on art historical territory, he does feel that "the quantity of all this building is not unrelated to the emergence of a new architectural style". While paying due homage to conceptual architectural proportion and antique influence, Goldthwaite seems occasionally drawn to define this new style in terms of more craft-oriented criteria: Ruskin would certainly have been surprised at the statement that "the extraordinary

Goldthwaite's essentially non-hierarchical view of Florentine society perhaps underestimates the role of the dominant Medici family in initiating the new type of palace. In the case of the Medici palace we can claim, looking again at Brunelleschi, that Renaissance architectural style was marked by the introduction of largely standardized elements, where the artisan's skill was reduced to that of the copyist.

The Renaissance is conventionally seen as the period when the designer-architect took over from the medieval master mason. In 1547, after his appointment as chief architect to St Peter's, Michelangelo wrote to his nephew asking for certain measurements of Brunelleschi's dome together with some indication of the Florentine unit of measurement. A month later he wrote again, in fury: "You sent me a brass measuring rod as though I were a builder or a woodworker that I should have to carry it about with me. I was ashamed to have it in the house, and I gave it away". We can see from Goldthwaite's account of the training and status of the architect that although Michelangelo's disdain for the building trades in one sense marks a change in attitudes, none the less the tradition of the architect as a designer has a long history in Florence.

No *muratore* ("waller" or builder, as opposed to the *scarpellino*, who worked the stone) ever became an architect in the fifteenth century; conversely, painters like Giotto and Orcagna had already taken architectural positions in the *Trattato*. Routes, into the as yet undefined architectural profession were all by way of crafts involving design, goldsmithing, woodcarving, stonemasonry, as well as painting. Thus the view held by the sixteenth-century Academy of architecture as one of the three parts of *disegno* was firmly rooted in the Renaissance tradition even if the embarrassment about artisan associations was new. Cellini felt that Antonio da Sangallo's architecture lacked a certain "nobility" because he had started as a woodworker rather than a painter or sculptor. At the same time, the greater sophistication in draughtsmanship and the higher status of the architect in the sixteenth century did not necessarily lead, as Goldthwaite implies, to greater detachment from the building site. Architects continued to supervise construction in Florence, as elsewhere, late into the sixteenth century. Even Michelangelo, in the last decade of his life, wrote to Vasari of his "sorrow and sorrow" that because old age prevented him from constant visits to St Peter's, the *capomastro* had misdirected the construction of one of the vaults.

As an economic agent the architect remained in an anomalous position. For although the idea that it is natural for an architect who plans the building to be better remunerated than a mason or stonemason who works with his hands under the other's orders is at least as old as Aquinas, in practice it was hard to earn money by designing, as opposed to supervising, construction of a building. Professor Goldthwaite shows that the fifteenth-century Florentine architect had to piece together a living from practising another profession, holding office as *capomastro* to an institution, and/or working as a consultant on several jobs at once. Before the reign of Duke Cosimo I Florence had few regular well-paid jobs to offer the architect, and there was a consequent drift to other centres.

The text of *The Building of Renaissance Florence* is delightfully illustrated with contemporary depictions of the building trades at work. The appendices include an invaluable table of average daily wages of skilled and unskilled labourers from 1310 to 1599. The index is excellent, and the book as a whole is a masterpiece in its breadth, command of detail and readability. Renaissance historians seem inevitably drawn to art, but it is indeed rare to find one who marries history and art history with such skill.

Jon Silkin

# The ship's pasture

In the sun, the leaf, hesitant but active  
this floorcase of plait wood; with Joy  
I saw the fields of England, as oow, chartered  
shaped, bargained for, and so, sopped  
with standing sheep, their mowly garments  
by the limestone walls, their mowly garments  
their thick loam forms brails dangling  
the soft wealth of England: selab. Except  
some people bare are brutal, the flat,  
because of standing to the wrong place,  
at the cheekbone. Flat, or inside  
arrowy word.

I rose from England moor refreshed, but returned  
at evening: much undone that was once good  
prior to this mean junction. It was Joy,  
beside myself, to see the new fields. Whose  
this land that, like waiting flesh, turns  
with a kiss, domestic, but yet it is  
a local habitation or substance or name  
for it? It is the ship's pasture,  
its interlinking hunk of submarine,  
sea-spoke, the sloated fields of destruction:  
for payment, for emolument. I am  
part of this: the bee, cutter of wood,  
the timbered house unimaginably  
hospitable. This is what it is. Northwards,  
a new Jerusalem with the lamb lies separate,  
its shade dense and lovely. The woman  
starts again, as though each poritoo of this  
were knit afresh.

مكتبة الأصيل



# The visionaries of Castile

By Peter Linchan

WILLIAM A. CHRISTIAN JR.  
*Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*  
 359pp. Princeton University Press.  
 £16.80.  
 0 691 05326 X

Hard on the heels of his *Loyal Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (reviewed TLS July 3, 1981) comes William A. Christian's second book in a year. The technique and the emphasis are the same as before, and again much interesting material is presented in readable form. But whereas the legwork for *Loyal Religion* was done for him by the compilers of the central source on which he drew, in this case Dr Christian has had to travel widely in Castile and Catalonia in search of his quarry. His sources are the texts of the notarial enquiries into, and the unwritten legends concerning, thirteen alleged apparitions, mostly of the Virgin Mary, occurring between 1399 and 1523. The texts are published here in *extenso*, in both the original (some for the first time) and in translation – and for this student of the late medieval Church will be chiefly grateful to the author, whose labours with printed and unprinted material have been profitably matched by personal experience throughout the peninsula. Christian can write about the activities of questors who gathered income for shrines in the fifteenth century because he has

had dealings with their counterparts in twentieth-century Galicia. The author's typology of apparitions suggests *inter alia* that a child or adult male tending animals in the wilds of rural Spain in his period – especially if the plague was in the offing – stood a considerably better chance than did a married woman of a vision of the Virgin, St Anthony of Padua or St Michael the Archangel. The seer, if true to type, would initially disregard instructions to warn the people to mend their ways or to restore the abandoned chapel which the encounter occurred, and would be punished either with a beating administered by the Virgin's attendants or have his limbs or fingers grotesquely contorted. His miraculous recovery by courtesy of his visionary visitor would serve to convince the community of the authenticity of his claims and occasion the establishing on the spot of a shrine which then became a centre of devotion and pilgrimages for an area of limited radius.

The author carefully examines the features which these apparitions had in common and those which distinguished particular visions. A "miraculous and more penitential message" is perceived by him in those reported from Catalonia. Monks (the predecessors of "nuns" in the Fatima visions) occasionally featured, but not, curiously, Jews. One interesting topic discussed by Christian is the role of children in these events; here his remarks relate to recent scholarly work on other areas of Western Europe. Another is the more hostile climate encountered by visionaries

after the Fifth Lateran Council in 1516 established new criteria for the authentication of apparitions. In La Muela in the 1520s Juan de Rahe and Francisca la Brava were flogged, not by the child-sized Virgin whom they claimed to have seen but by the officers of the Inquisition. Francisco at first thought that it was the Devil who had culled on her, so evidently did the inquisitors, and it is therefore regrettable that the author has not consulted Gustav Henningsen's study of Basque witchcraft and the Inquisition, *The Witches' Advocate*, as well as Peter Brown's more recently published *The Cult of the Saints*. Teasing the truth out of the testimony to this tribunal calls for special skills. The apparent lapse of apparitions during the next three hundred years may disguise the ability even of Spanish village-women to keep their spirits alive.

In all this Christian finds confirmation of his earlier stated views – that "what was partly involved was a pugnazation (from *pugna*, country) of Christianity – a kind of encoded recapitulation of the process by which rural pre-Christian autisms of a sacred landscape reasserted themselves over an initially cathedral- and parish – church – centered religion" with Mary as "successor to mother goddesses dealing with fertility," and the validation of "the local us opposed to the governmental or bureaucratic, and the common person, even the monk, as opposed to the nobility and the strong." As with *Loyal Religion*, however, doubts remain. Certainly comparison of the various accounts reveals the confined

nature of the stage and the influence both of local iconography and of like events of recent occurrence, as well as more remote sources of inspiration. The Christmas story – the "cycle of the shepherds" – was important too: "each village becomes a Nazareth". But what of the possibility of inspiration from above – not from right above, that is, but from a level a little lower than the angels, from "the nobility and the strong"?

Christian's pages on Guadalupe are particularly disappointing in this respect. The influence of the Virgin of Guadalupe was enormous; the apparition at Cubas for example in 1449 – the political context of which the author does consider – was eventually identified as her, and the Cubas shrine became Guadalupe's satellite. Yet Christian does not investigate the role of the Castilian kings in the development of Guadalupe, or the possibility that royal or archiepiscopal designs lay at the origins of the story of the vision and discovery of the image. Alfonso X's interest in miracles of the Virgin and the passage in *Siete Partidas* (here misdated) regarding fraudulent miracles are duly noted, but not the fact that in the earliest surviving account of the Guadalupe discovery Alfonso X and Alfonso XI are confused, nor that a later hand sought to make good the historical defects by annotating the manuscript – annotations

which the author omits from his edition – in order to mention the existence of a by then lost document which "proved" the authenticity of the image of the Virgin. It is misleading therefore to state of the Guadalupe story that "there is no attempt at documentary proof".

The magnetic attraction for Christian of local religion, self-regarding, self-sufficient and hermetically sealed, prevents him from considering wider issues which might in turn serve to shed more light even there. "I do not know," he writes, "whether the flurry of visions in Castile and Catalonia from 1449 to 1512 occurred in other countries as well". But this is precisely what the reader wishing to make sense of events in Castile and Catalonia will need to know. The wider vision revealed in the work of W. V. Turner, whom the author does not mention, is lacking. Vicent Ferrer's remarks on visions are noticed, but Juan de Torquemada merits only a one-line mention – presumably because Crima facie he was poles apart from Christian's starting-ground. Yet at many points in this stimulating book the reader is made aware of the false dichotomy that lies at its heart, and wishes that Dr Christian had found room for rather more exegesis – even if that had involved pruning some of the lengthy translations of his tantalizing and curious material.

## Categorical conclusions

By John J. O'Meara

JOHN MARENBOON  
*From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages*  
 219pp. Cambridge University Press.  
 £22.50.  
 0 521 23428 X

The main subject of this book is the cultural continuity between the Schools of Alcuin (late eighth century), Erigena (late ninth and early tenth), and the School of Auxerre (early tenth). Such a study cannot fail to be important and interesting when it is written with attention to detailed argument, and spiced with a measure of confidence and iconoclasm. At the same time one must not expect the exposition of a cultural continuity centred on the fusion of Logic and Theology – on essence, the Categories and the Universals – to be very easy reading.

In his discussion of the Palace School of Charlemagne, John Marenbon concentrates to very good effect on what are known within the discipline as the "Münich Passages". He demonstrates that these passages are evidence of a more sophisticated level of philosophical interest at the court of Charlemagne than has been acknowledged. He writes in particular at considerable length on Candida (English "Hwita"), who first came to the Continent around 793 and whom he believes to be the author of these passages. This Candida was Alcuin's friend and pupil and was, in the author's opinion, the outstanding philosopher of his generation. This is not the place to examine in detail the case made, but it carries some conviction.

The centre-piece of the book is a study of the doctrine of the Categories as it appears in the *Periphyseon* of Johannes Scotus Erigena. Marenbon is at some pains to point out that Erigena's philosophical discussion is always subordinated to the requirements of a system that is theological, and that this is why "there is much in John's thought on philosophical problems which is confused and contradictory". John's comments on logic take on a definite but specious magnificence – specious because so many of the problems confronted have been circumscribed by terminological ambiguities or mere self-contradiction. One may feel here that Marenbon has not handled with sufficient subtlety the undoubtedly difficult problem of relating the roles of philosophy and theology in contemporary discussions; it is well to have this assurance that he is steering a middle course between artificial sym-

pathy and entirely destructive critical investigation of Erigena's arguments. Such a course is perhaps impossible to maintain, but Marenbon makes a commendable effort at maintaining it.

He discovers four directions of thought as guiding principles to Erigena's treatment of the Categories: a radical negative theology, which bars all from any application (including *ratio*) from any application to God; a hyper-Realism, which conflates individuals with Universals; an ontology of participation ("a line of thought plainly in contradiction to the first and second directions"); and a theory of space which allows Erigena to elaborate his concept of creative cognition. Marenbon concludes that each of these different elements has its importance in Erigena's metaphysical scheme, but that they do not themselves link to form a coherent logical picture.

The final part of the book concerns itself with Erigena's circle and survive, with Sedulius Scotus, Martin of Laon, Wulfad and Heiric of Auxerre. In discussing the material in controversy associated with Erigena, Marenbon encounters the glosses written by two insular hands ("11" and "12"), each of which has been claimed by certain scholars as Erigena's own. He comes to the less exciting, but for his theories convenient, conclusion that these were the hands of pupils of Erigena. This helps to flesh out the reality of a circle of people around Erigena who were on a level of ability and philosophical matters with him. There is need to reduce the picture of Erigena painted by such as F. C. Copleston as "standing out like a lofty rock in the midst of a plain". Doubtless in due course this reduction will be overcome, but Marenbon does not overdo it. Likewise, from a study of the early tradition of the *Periphyseon* he coo gives welcome evidence that the work was far more widely and variously read than has been imagined.

After Erigena's time the normal method of philosophical discussion was the glossing – but not to the exclusion of original thinking – of texts such as the *Categorye* Decem and the *Opuscula Sacra* of Boethius. Here, as in the earlier periods studied, the central theme was not so much the problem of Universals as a complex of problems at the centre of which stood the concept of *ratio*.

This very useful study is rendered the more so by the addition of appendices on texts from the circle of Alcuin, a *Periphyseon* florilegium, and glosses to the *Categorye* Decem. There are also a bibliography (including index of manuscripts) and an index.

# Criticism as metalanguage

By Peter Kemp

GEORGE LEVINE  
*The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*  
 357pp. University of Chicago Press.  
 £15.  
 0 226 47550 6

WALTER L. REED  
*An Exemplary History of the Novel*  
 334pp. University of Chicago Press.  
 £13.50.  
 0 226 70683 4

ALAN WHITE  
*The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism*  
 199pp. Routledge & Kegan Paul.  
 £12.  
 0 7100 0751 5

SAMUEL I. MINTZ, ALICE CHANOLER, AND CHRISTOPHER MULVEY (Editors)  
*From Smalltalk to James: Studies in the Novel and Other Essays Presented to Edgar Johnson*  
 301pp. The University of Virginia Press.  
 £16.50.  
 0 8139 0563 6

JULIET AND ROWLAND McMASTER  
*The Novel from Sterne to James: Essays on the Relation of Literature to Life*  
 218pp. Macmillan. £15.  
 0 333 27658 2

MARIANNA TORGONOVICH  
*Closure in the Novel*  
 238pp. Princeton University Press.  
 £10.75.  
 0 691 06464 4

To judge by noises from the newer branches of literary criticism, those who occupy positions there are never happier than when mimicking each other. Sounding similar appears to be their principal aim. Perhaps this is unavoidable. Sentences, after all, maintain that sign have significance only in relation to other signs. Interminably, it's currently fashionable literary orthodoxy – insists that texts can be read only in relation to other texts. So it's not surprising that be more conscious of their relation to each other than to the literary texts they're supposedly elucidating. At any rate, imitateness is the primary way of signalling allegiance to the group. A standardized palaver – "metalanguage", as its users like to think of it – bonds its members, and serves to keep outsiders at a discomfortable distance. Even critics who can't swallow some of the fundamental tenets – such as non-interpretation – try to stay as close to the pack, verbally as they can; they too, cautiously fill their prose with gestures of submission.

It is not only in matters of style that the current trend imposes uniformity. There's also a disregard for the originality of the texts being scrutinized. Individuality – absent from the critics' own language and attitudes – is the last thing looked for in literary works. Weirily homogeneous themselves, practitioners of this kind of criticism try to make literature conform to the same pattern. Imaginative idiosyncrasy, originality, distinction: these are flattened under ponderous generalizations which reduce books to almost indistinguishable specimens of mediated ideology, genre-convention, narrative teleology, and the like.

The first task of a literary critic, it now seems widely assumed, is to put together a theory: the second is to make texts fit it. The distortion frequently necessary to achieve this is facilitated by the use of an inappropriately technical vocabulary – likely to make works sound far more sophisticated than they are – and a studious remoteness from textual detail. An extreme instance of this approach is to be found among the books reviewed here. In an essay, "Character in the Novel", included in the *From Smalltalk to James* collection, J. Hillis Miller takes a current tendency to

the limit by erecting a theory on no foundation whatsoever. His contention is that it is "The function of novels within the community of its readers" (sic) both to reinforce and destroy the notion of character. The novel, he believes, has a "magical power to generate the illusion of character" which gives it a "benign power to maintain society". This sounds fey as well as unlikely. But whimsy soon flees as the deconstructive self is trundled in. Girding himself for some intellectual action, Hillis Miller states that, besides putting forward "hypostatized figures posited as substances", the novel regularly performs an "auto-destructive" act. Though "a pulsant reinforcement... of the illusion of selfhood", it has "constantly and explicitly deconstructed that illusion" – a function he calls "utopian" (somehow unlighteningly glossed as "a throwing away of what is already thrown away in order to save it"). Fiction, one gathers, first creates, then destroys, the concept of character. This act – crucial to the maintenance of an illusion upon which a culture may depend – is carried out in a perpetual tension of say-saying and say-saying. Of say-saying, which cannot be said without the saying-saying it says unsays. Extraordinarily enough in itself (though typical in the massive claims it makes for the role of literature and, by implication, of those engaged in the study of it), this theory of the everlasting yea-and-nay is, even more extraordinarily, unsupported by a single piece of evidence. Not one example is produced even to buttress Miller's assertion that novels are continually "undoing the notion of character".

The passages deconstructing the notion of character in *Middlemarch*, say, or in *Daniel Deronda* – commonly passed over in silence as if they were not there – lie close just this himself.

No other critic here is quite as vacuously theoretical. But a tendency towards the unalloyed hypothesis is endemic among the more trend-conscious ones. George Levine's *The Realistic Imagination* is an instance of this, as well as of another approach now common in novel criticism: that of the imposed paradigm. It's Levine's belief that *Frankenstein* "provides both a pattern and a metaphor for the very different realist literature that followed". To his eyes, it constitutes "a model for the whole tradition of realism", a metaphor for the strategies of realism. To associate *Frankenstein* with realism at all seems strange; but this is a minor oddity compared with Levine's resolute squashing of the major nineteenth-century novels back into its mould. "Frankenstein and his monster", he declares with some understatement, "will turn up frequently in the chapters that follow". Nothing could be truer. Doubles for the two of them are spotted in all quarters. The monster itself – representing "sexual, revolutionary, deterministic, or psychic energies that novelists and intellectuals confront even as they try to avert them" – is especially prone to look-alikes. Professor Levine notes a marked affinity to him in Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*: "Like the monster at the De Laceys", she "learns by reading". Clinging the analogy, she is "cast out" through the behaviour of General Tilney, who does this casting out, is described by Levine as "monstrous". Things get a little confused. Another complication is the inconvenient fact that *Northanger Abbey*, though published the same year as *Frankenstein*, was written many years earlier. But, sweeping this aside, Levine insists on his Gothic reading: Catherine unleashes "monstrous energies" in an attempted "consumption of the world about her"; "monstrousness... would be visible if Catherine Morland had examined her lineaments in a mirror".

Clifford Chatterley is wheeled on as another unlikely avatar, on the grounds that he arrived back from

the war "more or less in bits" though since, according to Levine, his rationalism is a graft from the monster's creator, he's a messy amalgam to disentangle. In Hardy's fiction, "the monster stalks freely and visibly again". But the most surprising instances of metaphorical monster are to be found elsewhere. He is, it seems, "kin in the oppressed women and children of Victorian fiction: like Oliver Twist, Pip, Florence Dombey, and Little Nell, like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, like Daniel Deronda, Henry Esmond, and Jude Fawley, the monster is an orphan, rejected by his father". Most of these, of course, being orphans in the usual sense of having lost both parents, don't have a father to be rejected by. Nor does the monster have a father, merely a creator.

As this shows, facts often require some bending before they can be forced into Levine's schema. His book is scattered with minor errors symptomatic of an impatience with detail: Pamela's would-be seducer is Mr B., not Lord B.; Arnold's Empedocles, on the brink of suicide, debates with Pausanias, not Pausanias. More serious are perverse readings that are neither argued for nor documented. "Maggie Tulliver evokes the flood", it is almost casually asserted; and – ignoring the fact that she does attempting to save Tom – the end of *The Mill on the Floss* is described as "a psychological triumph in which, at last, she dominates her brother, and in which the repressed energies of love and anger are manifested in the equivalent of murder". What's presented in the later pages of *Women in Love* is likewise turned upside down. The icy Tyrolean setting, Levine thinks, "makes the mixed condition of the bourgeois world below seem petty and contemptible"; hit, as Lawrence conveys with glaring clarity, it's meant to represent the chilling culmination of the "Northern progress" of destruction, something Gerald's frozen corpse also makes starkly apparent.

Ruthlessly, too, Levine smother exceptions that would call his generalizations into question: a blanket-

description like "the moderate landscapes of the Victorian novel" is confidently thrown out as though Dickens's palpitating geographies did not exist. And the variegated personalities of nineteenth-century fiction are press-ganged into uniformity by a shady kind of analogy that is always on the prowl: "As Victor Frankenstein is his monster's double, his brother's, his mother's, his sister's, his father's, so Hawthorne is the double of Farfrae and Elizabeth Jane, Jopp and Abel Whittle, Newman and Lucetta." What's particularly surprising about this mashing of everything into a homogeneous pulp is that Levine initially professes an intention "to keep my eye on the texts whose wonders are the occasion of this study". "Wonders" sounds unpromisingly headbashed, perhaps: one of the oddities of the newer types of critic is that, when they lay aside the linguistic screwdrivers and circuit-diagrams they tend to fall back on the romantic throwing-up of hands (even Hillis Miller, when not tinkering with his utopian musings, thinks novels "magically" create the idea of character). But, in any case, such wonders get almost shrift. Levine's criticism, he confesses, "was made possible by the criticism it often attacks in notes, by the contemporary insistence on the sheer textuality of fiction". Its pervasive indulgence in trade-talk and hazy panorama makes this patently apparent.

Lexical stains from immersion in recent literary theorizing disfigure Walter L. Reed's *An Exemplary History of the Novel* even more badly. He has, as his opening pages all too evidently show, spent much time on the "recent structuralist practices of literary discourse". Off-puttingly mottled with the results of this – "hypnotasia", a homology of structures, "non-disjunction" – his prose, as he surveys the novel in its "performative space of the printed book", smears everything together into a portentous blur. The language of his paraphrases is misleadingly, and often hilariously, distant from the subject matter. An incident in the novel he takes as an example of the phallus as the signifier par excellence – a signifier whose function as such depends on the fantasy of its removal. Other sections of the novel find Reed laboriously burying the obvious beneath the cumbersome. Faced with the black page, he helpfully points out, the reader is "forced momentarily to read the text elsewhere, on a different semiotic level from most of the rest of the book". Likewise, with the blank page, he is "transposed into a less specifically encoded space, which requires new responsive techniques". Blandly engaged in processing the unmissable into the near-incomprehensible, Reed makes elementary historical gaffes about the book. Its title, he declares in his usual vein, points "towards a number of different semantic directions" – one of which is "a light alcoholic drink". This particular meaning of "handy", according to the OED, entered the language around 1853, almost a hundred years after the novel began to be published. A Shandy-gaff, presumably.

Like Levine and Miller, Reed is a great generalizer. His early pages resound to the clang of a theory being hollowly erected. Though proposing to offer "a history of the novel rather than a poetics", he does – fashionably – "claim for this history of the novel a paradigmatic value". Since his "exhibition" – one showing the twin evolution of the Spanish picaresque and *Don Quixote* – consists only of *Moll Flanders*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tristram Shandy*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Confidence-Man*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *Felix Krull*, and *The Sot-Weed Factor*, it seems a quixotic exercise in itself to argue that it serves as "a model of what the novel is and does". But, then, Reed's definition of a novel is hardly mainstream: "a novel", he declares with true intertextual oxymoron, "characteristically opposes itself to other novels". This pedantic belief – shifting attention from originality to stereotype – explains why parodic books get so much attention, these days; and why literary criticism is so often close to self-parody.

The novels he examines, Allan White believes, characteristically oppose themselves to curiosity: *The Uses of Obscurity* trains its attention on "the moment when obscurity began to appear as an important, positive aspect of nineteenth-century English fiction". The author's style – "The novels can be seen as textual dispositions of these vectors in the structure of writing in a way which is analogous to the concept of *Geistesbeschäftigung*" – suggests why he's attracted to the topic. Low-visibility

## Hausfrauenchor

"She's younger than I am, almost certainly blonde, and she sleeps with her once a year... The occasion is the office-party – alcohol, music, and their formal routine collaboration suddenly becomes something else. – All over the country, wives wait to the agony columns for advice. One letter covers thousands of cases. Of course, you want to allow him his bit of fun; after working all year for Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* and your own. And it's probably more than you can provide with your cooking, your meat-and-two-veg sex, the occasional *Sauerbraten*... He deserves it. The rest of the time, he's faithful to you. But when he comes home at some godforsaken hour, lipsticked and dishevelled, drunk as a god, his dried sperm crackling and flaking in his pants, then you feel differently about it. You wish you'd gone to the party and kept an eye on him. – But then the newspapers don't recommend that: husbands resent it – what's your business in an office where you never set foot otherwise? They tell you the only course is to declare a general amnesty for this particular offence. A mass-exemption, like the students of '68, who no longer have a "past", and instead hold positions in the civil service: vetting radicals; checking over photographs of demonstrators; algorithms on petitions; looking for traces of the loathable red paint that is sprayed over crowds of Communists to identify them. So the best way to kill them is with kindness. – And it isn't any easier for the secretary because she doesn't want to be a cock-teaser, she gets into trouble with her boyfriend. A week or two later, she gives my husband a tie for Christmas. The whole family (himself included) make fun of it, a silly pattern, awful colours, what a useless garment anyway. But then he wears it all the following year."

Michael Hofmann



